the weekly standard

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OBAMA'S LOST YEARS
A SPECIAL REPORT
BY STANLEY KURTZ

HOLLYWOOD TAKES ON THE LEFT

David Zucker, the director of *Airplane!* and *The Naked Gun*, turns his sights on anti-Americanism • BY STEPHEN F. HAYES

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In the new issue of *Policy Review*

Conservative Internationalism

From Jefferson to Polk to Truman to Reagan

The debate between realists and liberal internationalists leaves no explanation for Ronald Reagan's eclectic foreign policy choices and the extraordinary outcomes he achieved. The conventional foreign policy traditions don't fit. Realists and liberal internationalists try to claim Reagan, but they distort and miss the novelty of his contributions. Others conclude that he is unique and "has become a transcendent historical figure," but not terribly relevant to contemporary debates. Still others argue that Reagan's foreign policy had nothing to do with ending the cold war and that it subsequently wound up in the hands of Reagan impostors, the neoconservatives in the George W. Bush administration, who ran it into the ground in Iraq.

This essay rejects all these conclusions. It argues instead that Ronald Reagan tapped into a new and different American foreign policy tradition that has been overlooked by scholars and pundits. That tradition is "conservative internationalism." Like realism and liberal internationalism, it has deep historical roots. Just as realism takes inspiration from Alexander Hamilton and Teddy Roosevelt and liberal internationalism identifies with Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Roosevelt, conservative internationalism draws historical validation from Thomas Jefferson, James K. Polk, Harry Truman, and Ronald Reagan. These four American presidents did more to expand freedom abroad through the assertive use of military force than any others (Lincoln doing as much or more to expand freedom domestically by force). But they expanded freedom on behalf of self-government, local or national, not on behalf of central or international government, as liberal internationalists advocate, and they used force to seize related opportunities to spread freedom, not to maintain the status quo, as realists recommend. All of these presidents remain enigmas for the standard traditions. The reason? They represent the different and overlooked tradition of conservative internationalism.

—Henry R. Nau

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THIS IS A COMBINED ISSUE. THE NEXT ISSUE OF THE WEEKLY STANDARD WILL APPEAR IN TWO WEEKS.

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BPA INTERNATIONAL

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How Green Was My Dorm?

Last week the *Washington Post* offered suggestions on ways students can "go green" in their dorm rooms. As staff writer Jura Koncius notes, "Students this year will be spending about $600 each for back-to-college products, according to a survey by the National Retail Federation, down 7 percent from 2007, in part because of a faltering economy and $50,000 annual tuition, room and board at some local private colleges and universities."

Not that this should discourage an incoming freshman from taking advantage of the environmentally friendly products listed, including: "eco-fabric shoe bag made partially from recycled water bottles" ($29.99), "garment rack made of renewable, sustainable bamboo" ($129), "Alena pillows woven with sustainably harvested hemp," ($31.95), "round storage barrel, $80, and rectangular storage basket, $60, made of scraps from flip-flop factories," and our favorite, "Smencils, scented pencils made of recycled newspapers" ($59.99 for 50 Smencils).

Apparently it's going to take a lot of "green," in the sense in which

The Scrapbook understood that word back in the previous century, to "go green" in the up-to-date sense of the term. But really, What student is going to spend $60 for pencils that smell? On the other hand, we have a sneaking suspicion that some of those pillows are going to be smoked. ♦

The Man Who Brought Us Cable

Clay Whitehead died last week, at the comparatively early age of 69, after a long battle with cancer. His name is not likely to resonate with the public, but Whitehead was one of those people, briefly in public life, whose influence was decisive, even historic—and decidedly benign.

An MIT-trained engineer and administrator, he was the first director of the old White House Office of Telecommunications Policy, during the Nixon administration, where his agile brain and conservative politics antagonized the Democratic Congress and Washington press corps of the late 1960s and early '70s. But it was Whitehead who fought for, and achieved, a market-based "open skies" policy for communications satellites and cable television licenses, ending the monopolies controlled by the federal government, and leading to competition, variety, and abundance on the airwaves.

The televised world we inhabit today—hundreds of channels, C-SPAN, Classic Arts Showcase, ESPN, Turner Classic Movies, the Weather Channel, Fox News, Animal Planet, you name it—is made possible by the work of this smart, personable, dedicated man whose premature death we note with regret. ♦

Sentences We Didn't Finish

"'I have always loved longitude,' Nancy Pelosi says before breaking into laughter. 'I love latitude; it's in the

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(Classic Steiner, reprinted from our issue of October 21, 2002)

stars. But longitude, it's about time . . .'" ("Pelosi: 'I'm trying to save the planet,'" *Politico*, July 29, 2008) ♦

Mistaken Identity

THE SCRAPBOOK, which is sometimes mistaken for a Diarist or an Editor's Note, sends its condolences to Harvard's president—who is also Harvard's first woman president—Drew Gilpin Faust.

In the July 23 edition of the *Times Literary Supplement*, editor Peter Stothard wrote a brief item about President Faust's recent book on death in the Civil War, which has just been published in Britain, explaining that "he applies the same process of demythology . . . that Paul Fussell applied to the First World War and Nicholson Baker has just attempted for the Second" (see Page 37 for our review of Baker). Which is all very well, of course—except that, as noted, Drew Gilpin Faust is a she, not a he.

Now, you would think, THE SCRAPBOOK believes, that the editor of the *Times Literary Supplement* would know the name of the president of Harvard University, as well as the interesting fact that the president is a woman. But then again, would he? It is true that, in the past, certain college presidents in America were minor celebrities (Robert Maynard Hutchins, Chicago) or famous for their gravitas and longevity (Nicholas Murray Butler, Columbia). But nowadays they seem to come and go with the swift regularity of Italian prime ministers, even at such high-octane institutions as Harvard. Quick! Name the presidents of Yale and Princeton! See what THE SCRAPBOOK means?

The crisis in American higher education is not just in curriculum, or political correctness, or moral relativism on campus, but in the fact that the national stature of college presidents ain't what it used to be, and that yesterday's leaders in education, civic responsibility, and public morality, are today's fundraisers and arbiters of faculty parking space.

(Answers: Richard C. Levin, Shirley M. Tilghman) ♦

Sentences We Didn't Finish, II

"IGNATIUS: Zbig, few people in America have lived with the tumult of the Iranian revolution in quite the way that you have. You were national security advisor to President Carter at the time of the revolution. You struggled with the horrific months of the seizure of the U.S. Embassy and the hostage crisis. What are your starting points? How do you see the strategic issues?

"BRZEZINSKI: Well, my starting point would be somewhat . . . " (*America and the World: Conversations on the Future of American Foreign Policy*, by Zbigniew Brzezinski and Brent Scowcroft, moderated by David Ignatius) ♦

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Casual

Take My Mower, Please

How to know when you've made a spectacle of yourself? The first hint that I had gone from unremarkable though odd—my natural state—to publicly pathetic came when two young men, complete strangers, drove by my house and called out to me and laughed. I noted their out-of-town baseball caps, bearing the logo of a team I was pretty sure hadn't made a serious pennant run in decades, and their generally vulgar demeanor. I mean, Who taught these guys to slouch in their car like that? Still their condemnation lingered in the air. "Aww," they had said, "you're really saving gas now, Dude."

This was a reference to the lawn mower I was pushing, an American-brand reel mower. It is the old-fashioned kind without an engine.

Last fall, my wife Cynthia and I moved our children and our things into a new house, actually an old, somewhat beat-up house that needed work but offered us more room and a nice-sized yard. By nice-sized I mean it's big enough in the back for a game of whiffle ball and in the front for maybe a round of bocce.

It was fall, though, when we closed on the property, and the cold weather was coming on faster than any urge to cut grass. Having pushed a Sears gas mower over many neighboring yards as a child, earning maybe eight bucks a pop for what always seemed like the sweatiest two hours of my life, I entertained no illusions about the pleasures of this quintessential suburban chore.

And since reaching the age when it was possible to be a snob, I had come to regard the noise of mowers, weed-wackers, and leaf blowers as the great curse of living in the suburbs, well deserving of the kind of goody-two-shoes regulation I usually deplore. I mean, Where is the pleasure of life with a backyard if every Saturday from breakfast until dinner you have to listen to the revving of machines, the coughing of motor exhaust, and the nasal wawa scream of outdoor electrical appliances designed without the slightest concern for anyone's peace and quiet?

HAL MAYFORTH

I asked a friend in the city about the engine-less push mower he'd bought for a postage stamp of grass in front of his townhouse. He'd bragged about it at dinner when he first bought it. But now his story had changed. He didn't think the little mower worked very well. In fact, he said, I could have it if I wanted.

One man's garbage, as they say.

I haven't figured how to achieve exactly the crew-cut grass length I prefer, but my friend's old mower does a fine job of slashing the many varieties of grass and weed that cover my long-neglected yard. And it works quietly, with an understated whirr no louder than a broom sweeping, allowing me to cut the grass while my children nap inside.

Lugging it hither and yon, I find myself daydreaming about an old man who used to cut lawns in my neighborhood when I was a kid. On a big yard across the street from our house, he'd push a lawn mower almost exactly like mine, and then he'd carefully clip and prune the edges like a barber. Afterwards, nothing would look out of place, and Queenie, that was his name, would return all of his equipment to the trunk of a beautifully maintained sixties sedan—an old Ford Falcon I think, black with bright red interior—and drive away.

Apparently I myself do not present quite the image of stern landscaping dignity that old Queenie did. My choice of mower, in addition to inviting the ridicule of passersby, has caught the attention of the neighbors, a rather friendly and solicitous bunch, and more than one has offered to lend me his own gas-fueled mower. They don't seem to believe me when I say I prefer my own machine. I am, in fact, becoming a little defensive on this point.

One recent hot Saturday I went to work on the grass around lunchtime. I was soon in a sweaty lather. Watching me from the shady cool of his porch, my neighbor Stewart, who has fast become a family friend, could not take it any longer. He rushed down to the curb, his brow wrinkled with concern, his hands pleading for surrender, and implored me to, please, borrow his power mower and be done with it. I politely declined, of course, not saying what was really on my mind, that I may be a spectacle, but my neighbor, boy, is he a buttinsky.

David Skinner

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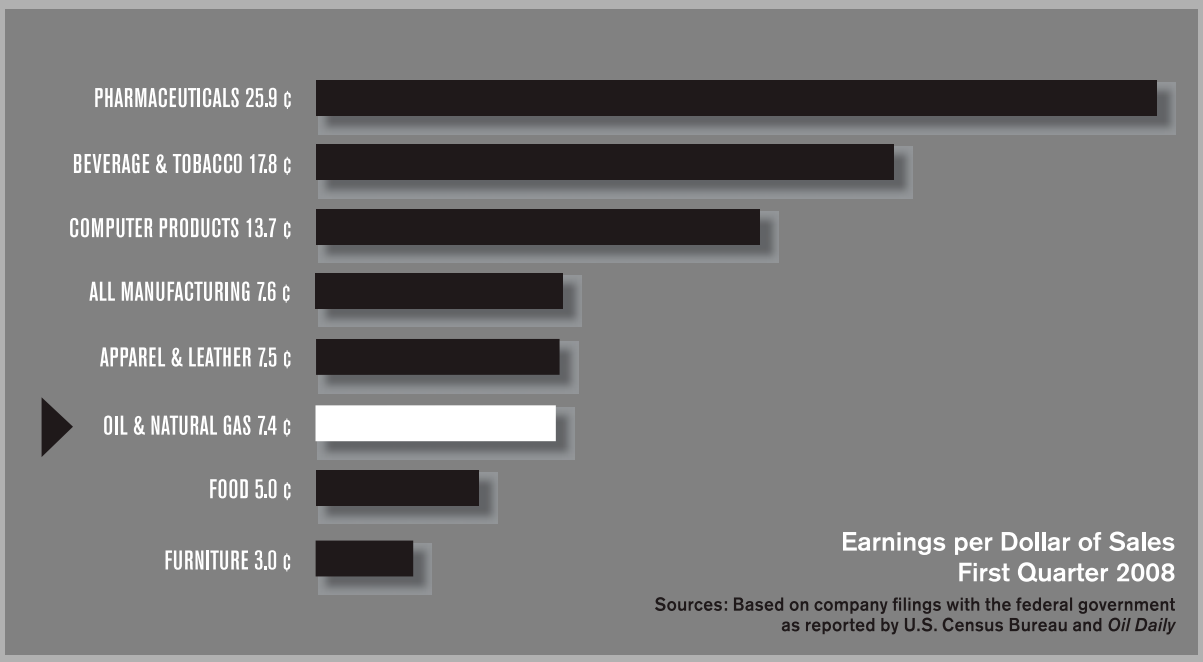
Straight talk on earnings



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the weekly Standard

Rewards of Wisdom

In January 2007, with Iraq in flames and Democrats set to take over Congress, President Bush had two options. He could side with Senator Barack Obama and begin a gradual drawdown of American troops in Iraq, leaving the Iraqis to a grim fate and dealing a serious and consequential blow to American interests in the Middle East and beyond. Or he could side with Senator John McCain and change strategies, sending additional troops to Iraq in an effort to secure the population and assist the Iraqis in their fight against al Qaeda and the Iranian-backed Shiite militias—the so-called "surge" policy. This latter option was the one Bush eventually adopted, of course. And for that, he deserves the thanks of Americans, of Iraqis, and indeed the world.

The surge is over. The last of the reinforcements sent to Iraq have returned home. The Iraq those troops leave behind is an utterly transformed place. Since their first offensive operations began in July 2007, overall attacks have been cut by 80 percent. The sectarian bloodshed staining Iraq in 2006 and 2007 has almost entirely abated. American casualties have fallen dramatically, with U.S. combat deaths in Iraq in July 2008 the lowest monthly total since the war began more than five years ago. Al Qaeda in Iraq has been routed, and the global al Qaeda organization faces what CIA director Michael Hayden calls a "near-strategic defeat" in Iraq. Shiite radical Moktada al-Sadr remains "studying" in Iran, while his militia has been cut to pieces by U.S. and Iraqi troops. The Iraqi army is progressing admirably; more than two-thirds of Iraqi combat battalions now take the lead in operations in their areas.

As the advocates of the surge predicted, a population that feels secure is a population more willing and able to reach political compromise. The Iraqi government has met almost all of the "benchmarks" the U.S. Congress set for it, and, although a national hydrocarbons law remains elusive, the country's oil wealth is being divided among its 18 provinces. That wealth is increasing dramatically as security has allowed oil production to return to prewar levels (and as prices have soared). The major Sunni political bloc has rejoined the Shiite-dominated government of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki. The Awakening, which began in Sunni-dominated Anbar province in the fall of 2006, has blossomed into a trans-sectarian, national, grassroots political movement. And Iraq is busy preparing for provincial and national elections that will further accelerate reconciliation by broadening and deepening the political participation of all the major groups.

It is worth pausing to reflect on what might have happened had Bush given in to popular opinion in January 2007 and abandoned Iraq. No one, of course, can say with absolute assurance how things would have turned out had the president opted to listen to Senator Obama rather than Senator McCain. But, at the very least, it is foolish to suggest that any of the military or political progress we have made in the last year and a half could have been achieved with a reduced U.S. "footprint" in Iraq. After all, it was the "light footprint" strategy of Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and Generals John Abizaid and George Casey that allowed the turmoil in Iraq to spin out of control between 2003 and 2007. The fact that America was continually looking for the exit during those years forced our allies in Iraq to hedge their bets and allowed our enemies to raise the pressure, eagerly anticipating the moment when they would have Iraq all to themselves.

Had Bush listened to Obama and decided to retreat last year, not only would the progress we see today not have occurred, but it is quite likely that the situation in Iraq would be much worse than it was at the end of 2006. Bereft of U.S. security, Iraqis would have turned to the nearest sectarian militia for protection from the widening civil war. An empowered and belligerent Iran would have moved to fill the vacuum America left behind, thus allowing the mullahs in Tehran to pursue unchecked their policy of "Lebanonization" in Iraq. And Al Qaeda in Iraq would have continued its barbaric killing spree, using the departing American soldiers as a recruitment tool, evidence of American weakness and unreliability. It would not be al Qaeda but the United States facing a "near strategic defeat" on Osama bin Laden's chosen front. And a defeated America would have led to a more dangerous world.

Fortunately, none of this came to pass. Bush sided with McCain, who had been calling for additional troops and a counterinsurgency strategy in Iraq since late summer 2003. We wonder what might have been averted—and what might have been accomplished—if Bush had adopted McCain's strategy five years ago. Whatever might have been, it was Bush's decision in 2007 that clearly put the United States and Iraq on the path to success. Those who attribute the gains in Iraq to other causes are delud-

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ing themselves. The Anbar Awakening might not have survived a year had it not been for the surge's demonstration of American commitment and resolve. Sadr fled to Iran and declared numerous "cease-fires" because Generals Petraeus and Odierno's full-spectrum warfare caught him off-guard. The sectarian militias were denied a safe haven and separated from the Iraqi population through effective counterinsurgency policies.

One of the chief lessons of the surge is that we are not powerless. Policy matters. The previous policy in Iraq was failing; Bush tried a new policy that is working. Another lesson is that, in this era of "soft" or "smart" power, force is still an effective means of achieving strategic goals. Those who argued that violence in Iraq would not stop until political accords were reached ignored the lessons of the first years of the war, when the Iraqis made great gains politically at a time of worsening violence. It was thought then, too, that the political gains would result in a more secure Iraq. Not so. When violence careened out of control in 2006, the Iraqi government was powerless to stop it. "Soft" power was useless. Military might was required to staunch the bleeding. And only when the violence was brought under control through the application of deadly force could politics resume and Iraq make its first real steps toward normality.

Contrary to conventional wisdom, experience cannot be separated from judgment. Experience matters. It was a lifetime of service and involvement in national security issues that gave McCain the perspective and insight to urge a change in strategy as early as 2003. When it came to Iraq it was the old man, McCain, not the young, fresh, and cool Obama, who was flexible in judgment and willing to try a new approach. And Obama has been inflexible in his error. He continues to advocate a political timetable for withdrawal from Iraq and states that he still would have opposed the surge regardless of its clear success. But a precipitous and premature withdrawal would undermine all the gains made in the last year and a half, and a timeline would breathe new life into the enemies of a stable and democratic Iraq. Barack Obama not only lacks experience and judgment; he lacks the capacity to admit he made a mistake and is therefore willing to risk everything the surge has achieved. Obama got it wrong when the stakes were greatest, and on the central issue of our time. Why on earth would we choose to reward him for it?

—Matthew Continetti, for the Editors

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Nancy Pelosi's Power Recipe

Complain your way to the top.

BY SAMANTHA SAULT

GARY LOCKE

Although 73 percent of Americans favor offshore drilling, Speaker Nancy Pelosi won't allow the House of Representatives to vote on the Republican bill to lift the drilling ban. In a recent CNN interview, Pelosi said she has "no plans" to schedule a vote on it because she opposes drilling in "protected areas." She is contradicting the pledge she made in 2007 at her swearing-in as speaker: "I accept this gavel in the spirit of partnership, not partisanship, and I look forward to working with you, [Minority Leader John] Boehner, and the Republicans in Congress for the good of the American people." What's her excuse for her recent stand? The *Politico* reported last week that she said, "When you win an election, you win the majority, and what is the power of the speaker? To set the agenda, the power of recognition, and I am not giving the gavel away to anyone."

While this important legislation stalls in the House, the speaker is traveling the country to promote her new memoir, *Know Your Power: A Message to America's Daughters* (Doubleday, $23.95). Last Monday she appeared on *Today*, *The View*, and *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*. She's visiting bookstores nationwide. At this point the book seems to be tanking.

Know Your Power is short—both in length and substance. In just over 170 pages with large print and wide margins, Pelosi races through her journey "from homemaker to House Speaker." She chronicles her childhood in Baltimore as the daughter of Democratic congressman and mayor Thomas D'Alesandro Jr., her entry into California politics distributing fliers for Democratic candidates while pushing a stroller, and the political rise that led her all the way to election as the first female speaker of the House.

She tells America's daughters that they can achieve anything if they "know their power." On the very last page of text she tells women we can discover this "power" in "our roots and our families," "our faith, our accomplishments, and our values." She even gives some good advice to modern girls.

"It always made me sad when I heard women reply to the question 'What do you do?' by saying 'I'm just a housewife,'" she writes. "My message to women is to place a higher value on the experience of being a mother and homemaker." Her own experience certainly deserves respect: She didn't run for Congress until her youngest child was a senior in high school, and she still managed to smash what she calls the "marble ceiling."

But her positive message is diminished by the tiresome feminist complaining that fills the "self-help" book's pages. Is this what gives Nancy Pelosi "power"?

Despite her own story, Pelosi told

Samantha Sault is a deputy online editor at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

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Today host Meredith Vieira on Monday, "I think sexism is all-pervasive in our society." She added, "I don't make a big issue of it." Yet, she does.

Pelosi complains that when San Francisco mayor Joe Alioto phoned to ask her to join the city Library Commission, he asked if she was "making a great big pot of *pasta e fagioli*." He "assumed that the only thing I could be doing at five in the afternoon was cooking," she says—never mind that she happily stayed home "cooking meals for five children for 20 years."

She complains about the "double standard" in "the way in which the press—and the public, too—examines a woman candidate's clothing and hair down to the millimeter." But the only example she provides is a woman who compliments Pelosi's designer suit on the campaign trail, thinking it is her "favorite pattern. Simplicity 124!"

Even Pelosi's husband Paul is at fault. Soon after they met, he asked her to pick up his shirts from the drycleaner while she was there to collect her own. "How could he *ever* have thought I would pick them up?" she asks, apparently unfamiliar with the idea that friends do each other favors. "After we were married, he once asked me to iron a shirt. That didn't happen either," says the 20-year stay-at-home wife and mother.

Pelosi warns young women about "The Secret Sauce Club" among men "in Congress, a corporation, a boardroom, or a campus." She explains, "Their message was, 'Only we know the secret sauce for success; you don't, and you never will.'" She doesn't provide any examples, but she does say, "It's going to take a little more time—and a little more disruption—before the secret sauce attitude completely disappears." She encourages America's daughters to run for office and gain "many more seats at the table," but why would they want to when they read her complaints?

Nancy Pelosi encourages young women to forge their own paths, but explains that women will only succeed with the help of Pelosi's self-proclaimed "San Francisco values": "community, individual rights, and protection of the environment." She says more women could run for office if they had access to "quality child care." She doesn't explain what this means or who will pay, although we can guess. She adds, "I consider my role in politics as an extension of my role as a mom." Not only will Nancy Pelosi's mommy state provide women with quality child care, but it will also provide affordable health care, affordable college tuition, and address "the global climate crisis." After all, as Pelosi told the *Politico* last week, she is "trying to save the planet."

Last, Pelosi heralds bipartisan cooperation and quotes her swearing-in speech: "Let us all stand together to move our country forward, seeking common ground for the common good. We are from different parties but we serve one country." She expresses this sentiment soon after she describes fighting "the Republicans' culture of corruption, cronyism, and incompetence." She says that the Capitol is "the most beautiful building in the world because of what it represents: the voice of the people"—unless of course the people support drilling for oil.

And if readers need more evidence of Pelosi's "bipartisanship," she provides an anecdote early in her book. When the Pelosis moved to San Francisco, they couldn't find a house for months. When the perfect house finally became available, Nancy learned that the owner was moving to Washington to join the Nixon administration—and she "could never live anyplace that was made available because of the election of Richard Nixon." She writes that her youngest child, "who hadn't been born yet, often says to me that she knows everything she needs to know about me by hearing that story." We do, too—although we didn't need to read her memoir to learn it. ♦

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A Matter of Principle

Colorado's right-to-work law champion.

BY FRED BARNES

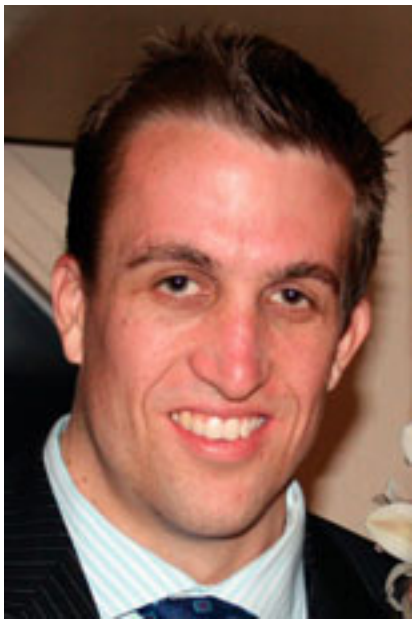
Jonathan Coors was outnumbered when he met with Colorado governor Bill Ritter Jr. last April. Ritter wasn't alone in his office. The governor's secretary of labor and chief of staff were there, along with several business leaders opposed to the effort by Coors to put a right-to-work referendum on the ballot this fall. Ritter was eager to make a deal.

If Coors would abandon his referendum, the governor would persuade labor leaders to drop their plans for ballot initiatives regarded as detrimental by the business community. Besides that, Ritter promised to protect the state's venerable Labor Peace Act, which makes union organizing difficult. A year earlier, the Democrat-controlled legislature had passed a bill gutting the 1943 act. Ritter had vetoed the bill.

Coors—yes, he's a member of the beer family—declined the offer. His position is "philosophical," he explains, a matter of principle, not politics. He believes a worker's right to refuse to join a union or pay union dues is not negotiable. "How do you negotiate a philosophical debate?" Coors asks, rhetorically.

He and his allies had little trouble getting enough signatures on a petition to get right-to-work on the ballot. Its official name is Amendment 47. But winning a majority won't be easy. At least one private poll shows the measure with better than 70 percent support. That's an illusory number, however, because it's all downhill from here. The natural evolution in the case of ballot initiatives is this: Though they often start out on top, voters find it easier to vote against than for them, particularly when there's strong and noisy opposition to the measure.

There will be plenty in Colorado.



Jonathan Coors

Organized labor is expected to spend millions to make sure Amendment 47 fails and that as many as four union-backed ballot initiatives pass, including one requiring businesses with 20 or more employees to provide health insurance and another making it harder to fire employees.

Labor, of course, regards right-to-work laws as practically a death sentence on the prospects for organizing workers. Twenty-two states have such laws, including all the states in the South, Texas, and Florida. The last state to pass a right-to-work referendum was Oklahoma. It passed in 2001 with strong support from then-Governor Frank Keating and a majority of state legislators.

That level of political support is absent in Colorado. In 2006, when Republicans controlled the legislature, they came within a single vote in the state senate of passing a right-to-work law that Republican governor Bill Owens was ready to sign. Now Democrats run the legislature. Ritter, too, is a Democrat.

Colorado business leaders are divided. The Colorado Association of Commerce and Industry favors the amendment, but the influential Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce doesn't. Nor does Coors Brewing, whose former president Leo Kiely wrote a newspaper article attacking it.

Business critics of Amendment 47 insist the Labor Peace Act, which they regard as a modified right-to-work law, has worked fine. Only 8 percent of the workforce is unionized, and Colorado rose to sixth place this year in the *Forbes* ranking of the "best states for business." The act requires an onerous second vote of 75 percent to create a "union shop" in which all workers must join the union or at least pay dues. The bill Ritter vetoed in 2007 would have killed the second-vote requirement.

The amendment has the backing of the National Right to Work committee. But its officials are skeptical of the chances of passing a referendum, and they fear a defeat would take right-to-work off the table for decades. Instead, they believe the most fruitful route to passage is through state legislatures.

Coors, 28, is undeterred. He is the son of John Coors, who left the brewery in 1992 and joined CoorsTek, which makes ceramic and plastic products and had once been part of the Adolph Coors Company. John Coors and the Coors family bought out shareholders in 2003 and took CoorsTek private.

Despite his last name, Jonathan Coors is not a political powerhouse in Colorado. He spent 2004 and 2005 working on the advance team of California governor Arnold Schwarzenegger. He left, a friend told the *Denver*

Fred Barnes is executive editor of THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

A BETTER COLORADO

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Post, after concluding the governor is a pragmatist and not a principled politician. Since then, he's studied at the University of Denver and will receive an MBA this summer.

His opponents suspect Coors has a not-so-hidden agenda of impeding the union movement. He denies it. "Every now and then, you have to take a stand for something," he says. Ritter has said that having right-to-work and labor amendments on the ballot will create "mutually assured destruction" between business and labor. Not so, Coors says mildly, "I do this out of a passion for moving Colorado forward." ♦

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Inside the Bubble

The looney left's articles of faith.

BY JEREMY RABKIN

I said the proceedings were "slightly demented." I was being polite. I was one of two witnesses invited by the Republican members to testify at the House Judiciary Committee's hearings on "executive power and constitutional limitations" on July 25. The event was more accurately described by one of the Republican committee members as "impeachment lite."

The hearings brought out a whole gallery of Code Pink enthusiasts who, with giggling excitement, talked of the event among themselves as "the impeachment hearings." Dennis Kucinich was one of the star attractions. He isn't a member of the Judiciary Committee, but he got himself invited as a witness. There were four such congressmen in an initial panel. Kucinich then arranged to come back and participate in a second panel of outside experts.

Most Democrats on the committee showed up for at least part of the show. It went on for more than six hours, stretching into the late afternoon on a Friday, which only the most important hearings can do. The seating for "visitors" (that is, the cheering section) was full to the end. And to the end, the "visitors" provoked solemn reminders from Chairman John Conyers that they were breaking the rules by cheering, laughing, or hissing.

It was no honor to be there in the circumstances. The hearings were designed to showcase arguments of Bush critics—seven in all, in addition to the four congressmen who testified. Most had written books advocating impeachment or prosecution (or in one case, a truth-and-reconciliation commission). They would hold up their books for the C-SPAN camera at regular intervals.

The minority was allowed only two witnesses. Several wiser or busier colleagues had already found reasons why they couldn't be there. Stephen Presser of Northwestern University Law School, a distinguished scholar of constitutional history, was the other witness invited by the Republicans. He tried to stay above the partisan fray by offering the same analysis of standards for impeachment that he'd provided to the committee in 1998, when it debated bringing charges against President Clinton. But history wasn't on the agenda this time, and Presser retreated to very brief answers. He seemed embarrassed to be there. He is, as I mentioned, a serious scholar.

But I found the whole circus somewhat instructive. It was of clinical interest. There was no real suspense, of course. There isn't time to mount an impeachment in the few months remaining in Bush's term. Nothing has happened in recent months to give Democrats special reason to start impeachment proceedings now, when they failed to do so over the year and a half since they took control of Congress. If they were really going to initiate impeachment, they wouldn't have launched the effort on a Friday afternoon and wouldn't have received such limited attention from the media.

You might think of the hearings as a gesture of appreciation for the Kucinich supporters. The congressman was cheered when he entered the hearing room (hand in hand with his 30-year-old wife). At one point, when Conyers told Cindy Sheehan she would have to leave if she didn't stop shouting from the visitors section, he called her by name, as if she were a

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special constituent of his. Which, in a way, she is now. Conyers didn't try very hard to keep the crowd quiet. He called them "visitors" but they were more like clients or patrons of the proceedings.

Almost every witness claimed that Bush was guilty of dragging the nation to war through lies and deceptions. In recent weeks, even formerly cautious voices in the Pentagon have started to talk about our impending "victory." Not the best time to rehash old debates about what happened six years ago? None of the witnesses seemed to notice. Certainly none made any reference to anything occurring on the ground in Iraq. Their main point seems to have attained the status of a ritual incantation—"Bush lied. His claims have been shown to be false. He lied."

No one bothered to explain what motive could have impelled the president to lie. Wouldn't he fear to be found out, if he knew there were no WMDs to be found in Iraq? If he didn't know, should mistaken claims really be called "lies"? Was it reasonable to expect that everything claimed or predicted by intelligence estimates would later prove totally correct? No one was interested in arguing past any such obvious objections. "Bush lied" is now an article of faith.

Yet it doesn't seem to have the punch you would expect, even with those who invoke this claim. If you believe the president really told deliberate lies to take the country to war for personal or idiosyncratic reasons, you must believe the president behaved monstrously. But none of the Democratic witnesses—and none of the Democratic members of the committee—could keep their focus on the war. They also wanted to talk about Bush's abuse of executive privilege (by refusing to let White House personnel testify in congressional investigations), his abuse of signing statements (putting his own interpretation on enrolled bills while still signing them into law), allegations that he gave preference to Republicans at the Justice Department—charges that shouldn't be in the same league with wrongly dragging the nation into war.

I made this point in my initial statement. Why talk about anything else, if you really think the president is guilty of starting a war for personal or frivolous reasons? It's what I meant when I said the committee should recall that "the rest of the country is not necessarily in this same bubble in which people think it is reasonable to describe the president as if he were Caligula." No one noticed. We went on for hours reviewing the possible illegality of executive privilege claims, detention policies at Guantánamo, and other issues of secondary rank.

Almost every witness claimed that Bush was guilty of lying the nation into war. In recent weeks, even formerly cautious voices have started to talk about our impending "victory." Not the best time to rehash old debates about what happened six years ago? None of the witnesses seemed to notice.

But then there was a response. The C-SPAN audience was enraged. At least some of them were. My BlackBerry started buzzing even while I was sitting at the witness table. "BUSH IS WORSE THAN CALIGULA!!!!" More and more came my way over the next three days. Perhaps not a scientific sample, but it was as interesting as the "polls" they run on FOX or CNN where they ask viewers to "vote" on the question of the day. At least I didn't ask these people to contact me. From my sample—of 60 or so—I can say that nine out of ten were very, very angry.

They were angry at Bush, of course. They were angry at me for remarks they interpreted as defending Bush. They were most angry at me for speaking of them—the people so angry at Bush—as figures worthy of ridicule. Quite a few of them wanted me to know about their educational attainments, more wanted me to know how carefully they have watched congressional hearings, many more wanted me to know about the books and websites they have studied to reach their conclusions. "Don't call me crazy" was the usual point.

But, of course, quite a few couldn't be seen as anything else. A few wanted to go back to the events of 9/11: "Basic physics and common sense" disprove the official story that the Twin Towers were knocked down by a handful of terrorists in two airplanes. Some told me to "get down from your Ivory Tower," apparently under the impression that universities are dominated by Republican snobs. A few wanted to share their views on the Jewish Question, ranting about "Wolfowitz" and "the Jewish neo-cons." One dismissed me and mine as "Illuminati scum."

From professorial habit (in an era when email has largely replaced office hours), I made some response to every message. To my surprise, I found that many people offered reasonably polite replies, thanking me for responding to their messages and trying to respond to the one or two points I had offered them. The usual thing I pointed out was that, if they were angry at me for questioning impeachment, they should be more angry at Nancy Pelosi and Barack Obama who had much more to do with the failure of this Congress to open serious impeachment proceedings. Yes, said various respondents, good point. I'm mad at them, too. And "I didn't mean to say you don't have the right to your own opinions."

So I'm left with a horrifying thought. The acolytes of "Bush lied!" won't go away when Bush leaves the White House. But they won't become terrorists, either. They will settle into one of those domesticated cults, mixing apocalyptic claims with genial demeanor: "The End of the World is Upon Us—Please Give Generously." Even our darkest obsessions may end with "Have a nice day." ♦

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A Fool's Gold Medal

Don't waste your time looking for high ideals from the Olympic Committee. BY DEAN BARNETT

When the Olympics enter the public consciousness, we like to think it should be for sports-related reasons, even if some of us hardly consider the likes of synchronized swimming and curling real sports. But the Beijing Games have made news for all the wrong reasons. When the International Olympic Committee (IOC) seven years ago awarded the 2008 "Celebration" to Beijing, the *Economist*, taking special note of the Communist regime's deplorable human rights record, compared Beijing's honor to the one Hitler received when he hosted the 1936 Games in Berlin.

More recently, the focus has been on the astonishing air pollution in the Chinese capital—not that the human rights record has improved. Then last week, the IOC made news with its decision, since reversed, to prevent the small contingent of Iraqi athletes from participating in the Games. The IOC locked its five-ringed door on the Iraqi team because of what it deemed undue political interference by Iraq's National Olympic Committee. Oddly, the IOC never had any such qualms while Saddam Hussein's certifiably insane son Uday ran Iraq's Olympic program with an iron fist and a psychotic temper.

Among Uday's innovative motivational techniques (memorably chronicled by David Rose in *Vanity Fair*) were killing a defeated Iraqi boxer and caning the feet of his soccer players when they disappointed him. And yet somehow Uday's involvement in Iraq's sports program never aroused the IOC's ire. Indeed, the IOC's indignation is highly selective. For instance, though its rules proclaim that "any form of discrimination . . . on grounds of race, religion, politics, gender or otherwise is incompatible with belonging to the Olympics movement," the IOC never says boo to the all-male Saudi teams, which again this year have barred female athletes.

Unwholesome Olympics politics are more the rule than the exception. At Hitler's 1936 Games, the head of the U.S. Olympic Committee, a fellow by the name of Avery Brundage, allegedly rejiggered the American 400-meter relay team at the eleventh hour to exclude the two Jews, Marty Glickman and Sam Stoller. While defenders of Brundage's legacy dispute his involvement in such shenanigans, it's indisputable that Brundage was a fan of his Berlin host. After the Games, he praised Hitler at a Madison Square Garden rally, and in 1938 a grateful German IOC official helped steer a contract for the new German embassy in Washington to Brundage's construction firm (looming war caused the building to be postponed).

Naturally, Brundage went on to become president of the International Olympic Committee in 1951—a job he kept for the next two decades. In 1971, he still insisted that "the Berlin Games were the finest in modern history."

Most people today remember Brundage for his sorry performance at the 1972 Munich Games. When Palestinian terrorists kidnapped and killed 11 members of the Israeli delegation, the Games were suspended for 24 hours, whereupon an apparently less than bereaved Brundage concluded the memorial service with a bizarrely inappropriate speech denouncing the commercialization of sports and comparing the exclusion of Rhodesian athletes from the Games to the murder of the Israelis.

Of course, no one suspects that the Olympic bureaucrats believe their own Utopian rubbish. While the Olympic Charter insists that athletes compete in the games rather than nations, the press of every nation organizes its coverage by the national medal count. And if the Olympic movement were serious about its pledge that "competitions are between athletes . . . and not between countries," it would stop playing the victor's national anthem to honor the winner of each event. Anyone who pays attention to the International Olympic Committee will learn that any relationship between its rhetoric and its actions is entirely coincidental. If the 2008 Games become a propaganda triumph for Beijing, it will be regrettable—and entirely in keeping with the true Olympic tradition.

In a perfect world, it would indeed be a swell thing if athletes from around the world could convene to compete with one another, unmolested by their political overlords, and to celebrate, even momentarily, humanity's oneness. Then again, perhaps I've listened to one too many Barack Obama speeches.

After all, if a global celebration of sports divorced from the realities of global politics were achievable, should we even be shooting for such a thing? Too many people in the world have enough of a problem as it is distinguishing between the world's moral cretins and its good guys. Is it really wise to indulge the fiction that there's no distinction to be made between the civilized nations of the world and the uncivilized?

Besides, doesn't the ritual ignoring of evil and the absurd pretense that all of the world's governments are comparable properly belong in the bailiwick of the United Nations? ♦

Dean Barnett is a WEEKLY STANDARD *staff writer.*

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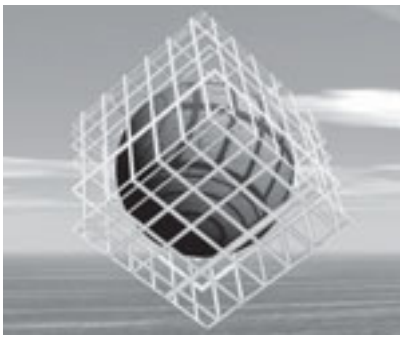

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Hollywood Takes on the Left

David Zucker, the director who brought us 'Airplane!' and 'The Naked Gun,' turns his sights on anti-Americanism

By Stephen F. Hayes

Los Angeles

For anyone who has ever been on a movie set, the commotion inside Warner Brothers Studio 15 will be familiar: serious-faced actors and actresses quietly rehearsing their lines; the director of photography huddled with his assistants around two high-definition screens inside a small black tent reviewing the last scenes; extras lounging around the set trying both to stay out of the way and to get noticed; carpenters busily working to construct the set for the next scene; a frazzled first assistant director guzzling Red Bull and yelling instructions to anyone who will listen.

"Rolling," he shouts.

Others throughout the cavernous studio echo his call.

"Rolling! Quiet please!"

David Zucker is sitting in a high-backed director's chair with his name on it. (I'd always assumed they were just used for effect in movies, but here one was.) Zucker is looking at a monitor showing the inside of an empty New York City subway station. It's actually just a set—a stunning replica of a subway station—and it sits 15 feet to Zucker's right.

The first assistant director breaks the silence.

"Action!"

The set jumps to life. Two young men—both terrorists—enter the station. They are surprised to see a security checkpoint manned by two NYPD officers. "I'll need to see your bag, please," says one of the officers. The lead terrorist glances nervously at his friend and swings his backpack down from his shoulder to present it to the cops. Just as the officer pulls on the zipper, however, a small army of ACLU lawyers marches up to the policemen with a stop-search order. The cops look at each other and shrug their shoulders. "This says we can't search their bags."

The young men are relieved. They smile fiendishly as they walk toward the crowded platform. As the lead terrorist once again slips the backpack over his shoulder, he mutters his appreciation.

"Thank Allah for the ACLU."

Zucker's latest movie, *An American Carol*, is unlike anything that has ever come out of Hollywood. It is a frontal attack on the excesses of the American left from several prominent members of a growing class of Hollywood conservatives. Until now, conservatives in Hollywood have always been too few and too worried about a backlash to do anything serious to challenge the left-wing status quo.

David Zucker believes we are in a "new McCarthy era." *Time* magazine film writer Richard Corliss recently joked that conservative films are "almost illegal in Hollywood." Tom O'Malley, president of Vivendi Entertainment, though, dismisses claims that Hollywood is hostile to conservative ideas and suggests that conservatives simply haven't been as interested in making movies. "How come there aren't more socialists on Wall Street?"

But Zucker's film, together with a spike in attendance at events put on by "The Friends of Abe" (Lincoln, not Vigoda)—a group of right-leaning Hollywood types that has been meeting regularly for the past four years—is once again reviving hope that conservatives will have a battalion in this exceedingly influential battleground of the broader culture war.

Zucker has always been interested in politics. He was raised in Shorewood, Wisconsin, a suburb of Milwaukee, in a household where Franklin Delano Roosevelt was viewed as either a hero or a dangerous conservative. He was elected president of his senior class at the University of Wisconsin, and, when he addressed his classmates at commencement in the spring of 1970,

Stephen F. Hayes, a senior writer at The Weekly Standard, *is the author of* Cheney: The Untold Story of America's Most Powerful and Controversial Vice President *(HarperCollins).*

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'An American Carol' is an extended rebuttal to the vacuous antiwar slogan that 'War Is Not the Answer.' Zucker's response, in effect: 'It Depends on the Question.'

Liberal filmmaker Michael Malone (Kevin Farley) poses with the poster of his latest project in David Zucker's 'An American Carol.'

ALL IMAGES COURTESY OF AN AMERICAN CAROL, LLC.

his speech was serious—a friend describes it as "solemn" and political. Among other things, Zucker condemned the Kent State shootings and lamented the mistreatment of America's blacks. Two years later, he appeared on stage with lefty leading man Warren Beatty and Democratic presidential candidate George McGovern. Zucker says at the time he was "very liberal." (His brother Jerry remains an unreconstructed liberal and recently optioned a sympathetic movie about the life and times of serial fabulist Joe Wilson and his wife, Valerie Plame.)

David Zucker got his start in entertainment right after school. In 1971, he teamed up with his brother and two friends to create an irreverent revue called *Kentucky Fried Theater.* They drew large crowds to cafés and small theaters in Madison and soon outgrew the college town. They went to Hollywood to chase the dream, and, surprise, the show worked in Southern California, too.

They caught the attention of some of Hollywood's boldfaced names—the show would serve as one of Lorne Michaels's inspirations for *Saturday Night Live*—and in 1977 they released their first film, *The Kentucky Fried Movie.* It was the first of many classics: *Airplane!*, *Top Secret!*, *The Naked Gun*, *BASEketball*. Actually, *BASEketball* sucked, but by the time it was released in 1998, Zucker had put together enough of a streak that he was widely regarded as a comedic genius. Matt Stone, who together with Trey Parker created *South Park*, starred in *BASEketball.* He described Zucker's influence this way: "I used to sit at home with my friends in high school and watch *Kentucky Fried Movie* and *Airplane!* and vomit from laughing."

Although these films had some political jokes, the movies themselves did not carry overt political messages.

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When Zucker heard Rosie O'Donnell claim that 'radical Christianity is just as threatening as radical Islam,' he knew he had several minutes of material.

Myrna Sokoloff and David Zucker on the set of 'An American Carol.'

Naked Gun 2½ came closest with a vaguely pro-environment theme. (It opens with George H.W. Bush meeting with the heads of America's coal, oil, and nuclear industries: the representatives of the Society for More Coal Energy [pronounced SMOKE]; the Society of Petroleum Industry Leaders [SPIL]; and the Key Atomic Benefits Office of Mankind [KABOOM].) Zucker, who owns a Toyota Prius and derives a third of the energy for his house from photovoltaic cells, is still an environmentalist.

In 1984, one of Zucker's college friends, Rich Markey, suggested he listen to a local Los Angeles talk radio show, "Religion on the Line," hosted by Dennis Prager. Zucker took the advice and soon struck up a friendship with Prager, whose conservative views appealed to Zucker as common sense. Although his politics were evolving, Zucker remained supportive of California Democrats, giving $2,400 to Senator Barbara Boxer in the mid-1990s. He contributed another $600 to an outfit called the "Hollywood Women's Political Committee" which, with members like Jane Fonda, Bonnie Raitt, and Barbra Streisand, probably wasn't calling for low taxes and abstinence education.

Zucker was still nominally a Democrat when George W. Bush was elected in 2000. "Then 9/11 happened, and I couldn't take it anymore," he says. "The response to 9/11—the right was saying this is pure evil we're facing and the left was saying how are we at fault for this? I think I'd just had enough. And I said 'I quit.'"

He decided to write a letter to Boxer, sharing his disgust and telling her not to expect any more of his money. Having never done this before, he asked a friend with the Republican Jewish Committee for help. This friend recommended Zucker contact Myrna Sokoloff, a former paid staffer for Boxer, who had recently completed a similar ideological journey.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Sokoloff had worked for several stars of the Democratic party's left wing. She served on the campaign staff of Mark Green, a close associate of Ralph Nader, when he ran for Senate in New York against Al D'Amato. She worked for Jerry Brown's 1992 presidential campaign and in 1998 was a fundraiser for Barbara Boxer's reelection effort.

Sokoloff had begun to sour on the Democratic party and the left generally during the impeachment of Bill Clinton. "As a feminist, I was outraged," she recalls. "If he had been a Republican president we would have demanded his resignation and marched on the White House." When she made this point to her Democratic friends, she says, they told her to keep quiet.

Although she didn't vote for George W. Bush in 2000, Sokoloff says she was glad that he won. Less than a year later, she understood why. "When 9/11 happened, I knew Democrats wouldn't be strong enough to fight this war."

Sokoloff and Zucker never did write the letter to Boxer, but their partnership would prove much more fruitful.

As the 2004 presidential election approached, Sokoloff and Zucker looked for a way to influence the debate. Their first effort was an ad mocking John Kerry for his flip-flops that the conservative Club for Growth paid to put on the air. In 2006, Sokoloff and Zucker followed that with a series of uproarious short spots mocking, in turn, the Iraq Study Group, Madeleine Albright and pro-appeasement foreign policy, and pro-tax congressional Democrats.

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The Iraq Study Group ad was the most memorable. It opens with news footage of British prime minister Neville Chamberlain celebrating the signing of the Munich Agreement. A newspaper stand boasting "Peace with Honour" flashes across the screen.

Neville Chamberlain: "This morning, I had another talk with the German Chancellor, Herr Hitler. Here is the paper, which bears his name upon it, as well as mine."

The spot cuts to footage of German bombers over Warsaw. "Well," intones a narrator, "that negotiation went well. Fifty million dead worldwide. Nicely done, Mr. Chamberlain."

Then viewers are shown footage of imaginary negotiations between James Baker, Syria's Bashar Assad, and "Iranian madman" Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Baker's Iraq Study Group had formally recommended talks with Iran and Syria as part of its proposed solution to the problems in Iraq.

When Ahmadinejad asks Baker for permission to develop nuclear weapons so long as Iran promises not to use them, Baker agrees. Triumphant music plays loudly in the background and the diplomacy pauses for a celebration and some photos.

The music stops and Baker returns to the table with Ahmadinejad and Syria's Bashar Assad.

"Next item: You must agree to stop supplying the explosive devices that are killing our American soldiers in Iraq," Baker insists.

"We won't do that."

"Well, can you reduce the number?"

"Okay, how about 10 percent?" Assad proposes.

"Twenty percent," Baker responds.

"Fifteen."

"Five."

"Sold!"

The music starts again and Baker, like Chamberlain, triumphantly waves the signed agreement.

"Now, this thing about destroying Israel," he says to Ahmadinejad.

"We will do that," says the Iranian leader.

Baker shrugs. "That's fair," he says, affixing his signature to yet another agreement and once again waving it before the cameras.

George Washington (Jon Voight) and George S. Patton (Kelsey Grammer)

Zucker says that the idea to do a feature film grew out of those ads, and several of the actors in the spots, including Turkish actor Serdar Kalsin, who plays Ahmadinejad, have speaking roles in the film.

If *An American Carol* grew out of Zucker's work on these commercials, the narrative device dates back to 1843. *An American Carol* is based loosely—very loosely—on *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens.

"Why be original?" Zucker asks. "I've done that. It doesn't work, like *BASEketball*"—as he says this, he rolls his eyes and moves his right hand across his body to indicate a car going off a cliff.

The holiday in *An American Carol* is not Christmas and the antagonist is not Ebenezer Scrooge. Instead, the film follows the exploits of a slovenly, anti-American filmmaker named Michael Malone, who has joined with a left-wing activist group (Moovealong.org) to ban the Fourth of July. Along the way, Malone is visited by the ghosts of three American heroes—George Washington, George S. Patton,

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'Obama is not qualified to be president,' says Zucker, who then pauses as if he's said something he should have kept to himself. 'Shouldn't I be allowed to say that?'

and John F. Kennedy—who try to convince him he's got it all wrong. When terrorists from Afghanistan realize that they need to recruit more operatives to make up for the ever-diminishing supply of suicide bombers, they begin a search for just the right person to help produce a new propaganda video. "This will not be hard to find in Hollywood," says one. "They all hate America." When they settle on Malone, who is in need of work after his last film (*Die You American Pigs*) bombed at the box office, he unwittingly helps them with their plans to launch another attack on American soil.

The entire film is an extended rebuttal to the vacuous antiwar slogan that "War Is Not the Answer." Zucker's response, in effect: "It Depends on the Question."

Zucker had originally hoped to cast Dan Whitney (aka Larry the Cable Guy) as Malone, but a timing conflict kept him from getting it done. After briefly considering Frank Caliendo, a fellow Wisconsinite, a colleague passed him a reel from Kevin Farley, the younger brother of the late Chris Farley, and Zucker, who recalled seeing Kevin Farley in an episode of Larry David's *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, was interested.

Zucker and Sokoloff met Farley in April 2007. Zucker described his new film with words he had chosen carefully. "I figured he was like everyone else in Hollywood—a Democrat," Zucker recalls. "And we knew that this was not a Democrat movie." It would be a satirical look at the war on terror, he told Farley, and explained that he and Sokoloff were political "moderates."

Farley hadn't seen any of Zucker's ads and assumed he was like everyone else in Hollywood—a Democrat. So he answered with some strategic ambiguity of his own. "I consider myself a centrist," he said, worried that they might press him more about his political views.

Zucker gave Farley the script and, concerned that Farley's agent would advise him against accepting the role because of the film's politics, told the actor not to show it to anyone. Farley, best known for his recurring role in a series of Hertz commercials, read the script and called back the next day to accept.

When he met Zucker and Sokoloff on the set as shooting on the film began, he told them that he, too, had long considered himself a conservative. "I couldn't believe it," says Sokoloff. "We were afraid that he would not want to be involved in something that was so directly taking on the left and that he would not want to play the Michael Moore character."

Farley told me this story during a break in filming at the Daniel Webster Elementary School in Pasadena, last April, with Steve McEveety, the film's producer, listening in.

"I thought that the minute we started talking about politics that would be the end," Farley recalls. "There was this dance that we did—a dance familiar to conservative actors in Hollywood. Lots of actors have done it."

"All three of you," said McEveety.

"Yeah, all three of us."

Farley is not aggressive about his politics and has chosen simply to opt out of political discussions when they have arisen on other projects. "I usually just bite my tongue unless it gets too ridiculous," he says. "The only thing that really bothers me is when they go off about the president. It just gets annoying."

If Farley is nervous that his proverbial big break is coming in a film with politics that might make getting his next big role more difficult, he doesn't show it. "If it's the last movie I do, I'll go work for Steve's company," he says.

"If this doesn't work," McEveety deadpans, "I won't have a company."

Yes, he will. He founded the company, Mpower Pictures, two years ago with John Shepherd, a former child actor, and Todd Burns, who helped put himself through law school by working as an EMT. McEveety, whose producing credits include *Braveheart*, *We Were Soldiers*, and *The Passion of the Christ*, is far too well-established to live or die based on the success of one film. And he created Mpower in part because he wanted the freedom to take risks on film projects others in Hollywood wouldn't consider. One such film, *The Fallen*, will be out later this fall. The film, based on a powerful book by Iranian journalist Friedoune Sahebjam, tells the true story of a young Iranian woman who is framed by her husband on false charges of infidelity and persecuted under the strictures of sharia law. According to McEveety, the Iranian regime has already begun an effort to discredit the film.

McEveety is one of several big names that will make it hard for the Hollywood establishment to ignore *An American Carol*. Jon Voight plays George Washington.

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Malone (Farley) meets with the leader (Robert Davi) of an Islamic terrorist group.

Dennis Hopper makes an appearance as a judge who defends his courthouse by gunning down ACLU lawyers trying to take down the Ten Commandments. James Woods plays Michael Malone's agent. And Kelsey Grammer plays General George S. Patton, Malone's guide to American history and the mouthpiece of the film's writers.

I chatted with Grammer on the set at Warner Brothers studios. "I'm glad some of the bigger guys jumped in—Dennis Hopper, Jon Voight, James Woods."

Grammer has been out as a conservative for several years and has publicly mused about running for office. His name comes up periodically when California Republicans are brainstorming about candidates to take on Barbara Boxer or Dianne Feinstein for their Senate seats. It's not hard to see why. He is passionate about the issues that matter most to conservatives and extraordinarily articulate.

"The accepted way to speak about America is in the voice that disrespects it. And the voice that's unacceptable is the one that loves America," he says, wearing the uniform of an Army general and sipping from a bottle of pomegranate juice. "How did we get here?"

Over the course of two hours, we are joined by several others working on the movie and talk about everything from taxes—"the rich in this country are being criminalized"—to Iraq. "Petraeus has to couch every bit of optimism in some convoluted formulation to avoid the promised rush of disrespect," Grammer says.

Eventually, the conversation turns from policy to punditry. Grammer, who is friends with Ann Coulter, says he quoted her once to some of the young people who work for him.

"'Ann Coulter,'" he says, recalling their horror and assuming their voice. "'She's the antichrist.' And I said: 'What the f— do you know about the antichrist? You don't even believe in Christ.'"

Robert Davi, who plays the lead terrorist in the Zucker film, joins us as the discussion turns from policy to the cable pundit shows. Davi is one of those actors with an instantly recognizable face—he was the villain in the Bond film *Licence to Kill*—but whose name is unknown to most of the country.

"I can't stand Keith Olbermann," says Davi. "Jesus Christ, I want to slap that guy."

"I just sit there and watch these shows"—he picks up an imaginary remote from the table in front of him, points it at the imaginary television somewhere to the right of my head and begins clicking—"I watch them all. I cannot watch the murder shows anymore. Greta comes on and"—he changes the channel once more.

Our discussion continues over lunch and we are joined by Myrna Sokoloff, Kevin Farley, and Chriss Anglin, who plays JFK. Lunch lasts an hour, and we discuss marginal tax rates, the Democratic primary, whether John McCain will pick Condoleezza Rice as his running mate, the Colombia Free Trade Agreement, and whether the talk of closing Guantánamo is serious or just campaign rhetoric.

Eventually, the conversation turns to the war and the opposition to it—the subject of their current project. "No one on the left wants to admit that radical Islamists want to kill Americans, the Jews—everyone in the West," Davi says. "I try to talk to my friends on the left and they just don't get it. Most of them have never even heard of Sayyid Qutb. How can you have an intellectual discussion about the war we're in without knowing who Sayyid Qutb is?" he asks, raising his voice so that actors from other tables glance

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Malone (Farley) takes cover as a judge (Dennis Hopper) defends his courtroom from ACLU lawyers.

over to see what's causing the commotion. JFK concentrates on his food.

Later that same day, I spoke to Lee Reynolds, who plays the New York police officer whose efforts to search the terrorists are thwarted by the ACLU. Reynolds, too, is a conservative—something David Zucker did not know when he cast Reynolds in the anti-Kerry ad he produced in 2004. Reynolds was active duty military for 12 years and shortly after 9/11 worked as the chief media officer for detainee operations at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba.

When he returned, he took a job as a production assistant on a film—he asked me not to name it—shot in several locations across the United States. Reynolds worked hard and, he says, won the confidence of the film's directors, who gave him more responsibility. But just as he was making a name for himself, word began to spread that he had been in the military and, far worse, that he supported the efforts of his uniformed colleagues in the war on terror.

"Once they found out I was a Republican, unfortunately for some people it was a problem," he recalls. Several people who had talked to him regularly throughout the shoot simply stopped. And a trip that he was to have taken to participate in an offsite shoot across the country was abruptly cancelled. Another person was sent in his place. Reynolds says that he had only two colleagues who treated him the same way they had before, including "an anti-Bush lesbian" who was disgusted by the dogmatism of the others on the film. Reynolds, now a reservist, is scheduled to leave for Iraq in early 2009.

The more Zucker is known as a conservative, the more frequently he has encounters with others who consider themselves conservative.

On one of the days I was on set, McEveety had invited Vivendi Entertainment president Tom O'Malley to meet Zucker. Vivendi had just agreed to distribute the film and had promised wide release—news that had the cast and crew of *An American Carol* in particularly good spirits.

O'Malley and Zucker chatted about the fact that O'Malley is the nephew of *Candid Camera*'s Tom O'Malley and that they are both from the Midwest, among other things. Zucker thanked him for picking up the movie, which will be one of the first for Vivendi's new distribution arm. O'Malley told Zucker that he was particularly interested in this film in part because he, too, leans right.

Such revelations are common occurrences at the periodic meetings of the secret society of Hollywood conservatives known as the "Friends of Abe." The group, with no official membership list and no formal mission, has been meeting under the leadership of Gary Sinise (*CSI New York*, *Forrest Gump)* for four years. Zucker had spent a year working on a film with Christopher McDonald without learning anything about his politics. Shortly after the film wrapped, he ran into McDonald, best known as Shooter McGavin from Adam Sandler's *Happy Gilmore*, at one of these informal meetings.

"It's almost like people who are gay, show up at the baths and say, 'Oh, I didn't know you were gay!'" Zucker says.

From the beginning, Zucker knew what the political message of *An American Carol* would be. His problem was how to make it funny.

The war on terror, of course, does not lend itself to hilarity. But Zucker knows comedy and has spent nearly four decades making people laugh. With his friend Lewis Friedman, a comedy writer, Zucker went looking for the absurd in the political left and found an abundance of material.

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Zucker and Friedman poked fun of the know-nothing culture of antiwar protests. During a rally at Columbia University, students chant: "Peace Now, We Don't Care How!" Some of their protest signs are ones you'd find at any antiwar rally. Some are not. "9/11 Was an Inside Job," "Kick Army Recruiters Off Campus!" "End Violence—War Is Not the Answer!" "End Disease—Medicine Is Not the Answer!" "It's Too Dark Outside, The Sun Is Not the Answer!" "Overpopulation—Gay Marriage Is the Answer!"

Other claims were so absurd they didn't require exaggeration. "We really didn't have to do a lot of stretching," says Zucker.

When he heard Rosie O'Donnell claim that "radical Christianity is just as threatening as radical Islam in a country like America where we have a separation of church and state," he knew he had several minutes of material.

In the film, a rotund comedian named Rosie O'Connell makes an appearance on *The O'Reilly Factor* to promote her documentary, *The Truth About Radical Christians*. O'Reilly shows a clip, which opens with a pair of priests walking through an airport—as seen from pre-hijacking surveillance video—before boarding the airplane. Once onboard, they storm the cockpit using crucifixes as their weapon of choice. Next the documentary looks at the growing phenomenon of nuns as suicide bombers, seeking 72 virgins in heaven. A dramatization shows two nuns, strapped with explosives, board a bus to the cries of the other passengers. "Oh, no! Not the Christians!" O'Connell's work ends with a warning about new threats and the particular menace of the "Episcopal suppository bomber."

Zucker is plainly not worried about offending anyone. David Alan Grier plays a slave in a scene designed to show Malone what might have happened if the United States had not fought the Civil War. As Patton explains to a dumbfounded Malone that the plantation they are visiting is his own, Grier thanks the documentarian for being such a humane owner. As they leave, another slave, played by Gary Coleman, finishes polishing a car and yells "Hey, Barack!" before tossing the sponge to someone off-camera.

It is one of just two references to the ongoing presidential campaign. (The other one, more cryptic, comes in a scene that's a throwback to the Iraq Study Group ad. Neville Chamberlain, after polishing Adolf Hitler's boots, signs the Munich Agreement, and declares: "We have hope now.") But Tom O'Malley, president of Vivendi, believes that the timing of the film's release—October 3—will give it special relevance to the current debates. And several of the film's leading figures have strong opinions about Barack Obama. "Obama is not qualified to be president, and it'll be a disaster," says Zucker, who then pauses as if he's said something he should have kept to himself. "Shouldn't I be allowed to say that?"

Zucker says that one of the major differences between the left and the right in America today is that leftists think of their political opponents as evil. "I don't think that Obama is an evil guy, I just think he's wrong. But I do think we face real evil in Ahmadinejad and the mullahs and all these crazy guys."

Does Obama understand that?

"I don't think so. I don't think so."

Zucker points to a *National Journal* study that found Obama to be the most liberal member of the U.S. Senate. "John Kerry was, and Obama is. Fortunately, Kerry was a stiff. But Obama isn't a stiff and he's really adaptable. He's like a really clever virus who adapts. Obama's the farthest left of all of these guys. And that's why he associated with all of those crazies—terrorists, preachers of hate."

Jon Voight, who says he was "duped" as a young man into rallying against the Vietnam war, is also troubled both by Obama's associations and his willingness to end them so abruptly. "When I look at the other side, when I look at Barack Obama, I see expediency," he says, pointing to Obama's relationship with the Reverend Jeremiah Wright, and assuming Obama's voice. "He's like family. I could never disown him. I didn't know him. I didn't hear those words in that church."

If those behind the film have similar views about Obama, many of them have opposing views about the long-term impact of a film like *An American Carol* on the movie industry.

"If this does well, it'll change everything," says Grammer.

"I think it would be pompous to say that," says Voight. "It's a movie. It's a satire. And it's a funny satire. I don't want to point to this thing, just because there are so few films from conservative sources, and make it a target. It's a movie. Let's not burden this little horse with additional weights."

David Zucker seems to be of two minds. When I ask him if he had an objective in making the film, he borrows a line from his friend and former partner, Jim Abrahams. "Avoid embarrassment."

He adds: "I don't have any desire to be taken seriously. Really, I really don't. But having said that, I really believe this stuff. Why can't I put it out there? And I'm scared to death of Obama. If I didn't do something about it I would feel—My kids would ask: 'What did you do in the war Daddy?'"

"I donated my career to stop this s—." ♦

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Barack Obama's Lost Years

The senator's tenure as a state legislator reveals him to be an old-fashioned, big government, race-conscious liberal.

By Stanley Kurtz

Barack Obama's neighborhood newspaper, the *Hyde Park Herald*, has a longstanding tradition of opening its pages to elected officials—from Chicago aldermen to state legislators to U.S. senators. Obama himself, as a state senator, wrote more than 40 columns for the *Herald*, under the title "Springfield Report," between 1996 and 2004. Read in isolation, Obama's columns from the state capital tell us little. Placed in the context of political and policy battles then raging in Illinois, however, the young legislator's dispatches powerfully illuminate his political beliefs. Even more revealing are hundreds of articles chronicling Obama's early political and legislative activities in the pages not only of the *Hyde Park Herald*, but also of another South Side fixture, the *Chicago Defender*.

Obama moved to Chicago in order to place himself in what he understood to be the de facto "capital" of black America. For well over 100 years, the *Chicago Defender* has been the voice of that capital, and therefore a paper of national significance for African Americans. Early on in his political career, Obama complained of being slighted by major media, like the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Chicago Sun-Times*. Yet extensive and continuous coverage in both the *Chicago Defender* and the *Hyde Park Herald* presents a remarkable resource for understanding who Obama is. Reportage in these two papers is particularly significant because Obama's early political career—the time between his first campaign for the Illinois State Senate in 1995 and his race for U.S. Senate in 2004—can fairly be called the "lost years," the period Obama seems least eager to talk about, in contrast to his formative years in Hawaii, California, and New York or his days as a community organizer, both of which are recounted in his memoir, *Dreams from My Father*. The pages of the *Hyde Park Herald* and the *Chicago Defender* thus offer entrée into Obama's heretofore hidden world.

What they portray is a Barack Obama sharply at variance with the image of the post-racial, post-ideological, bipartisan, culture-war-shunning politician familiar from current media coverage and purveyed by the Obama campaign. As details of Obama's early political career emerge into the light, his associations with such radical figures as Reverend Jeremiah Wright, Father Michael Pfleger, Reverend James Meeks, Bill Ayers, and Bernardine Dohrn look less like peculiar instances of personal misjudgment and more like intentional political partnerships. At his core, in other words, the politician chronicled here is profoundly race-conscious, exceedingly liberal, free-spending even in the face of looming state budget deficits, and partisan. Elected president, this man would presumably shift the country sharply to the left on all the key issues of the day—culture-war issues included. It's no wonder Obama has passed over his Springfield years in relative silence.

The Centrality of Race

Any rounded treatment of Obama's early political career has got to give prominence to the issue of race. Obama has recently made efforts to preemptively blunt discussion of the race issue, warning that his critics will highlight the fact that he is African American. Yet the question of race plays so large a role in Obama's own thought and action that it is all but impossible to discuss his political trajectory without acknowledging the extent to which it engrosses him. Obama settled in Chicago with the declared intention of "organizing black folks." His first book is subtitled "A Story of Race and Inheritance," and his second book contains an important chapter on race. On his return to Chicago in 1991, Obama practiced civil rights law and for many years taught a seminar on racism and law at the University of Chicago. When he entered the Illinois senate, it was to represent the heavily (although not exclu-

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sively) minority 13th district on the South Side of Chicago. Indeed, race functions for Obama as a kind of master-category, pervading and organizing a wide array of issues that many Americans may not think of as racial at all. Understanding Obama's thinking on race, for example, is a prerequisite to grasping his views on spending and taxation. Thus, we have no alternative but to puzzle out the place of race in Obama's broader political outlook as well as in his legislative career.

When it comes to issues like affirmative action and set-asides, Obama is anything but the post-racial politician he's sometimes made out to be. Take set-asides. In 1998, Obama endorsed Democratic gubernatorial hopeful John Schmidt, stressing to the *Defender* Schmidt's past support for affirmative action and set-asides. Although Obama was generally pleased by the U.S. Supreme Court's 2003 acceptance of racial preferences at the University of Michigan, he underscored the danger that Republican-appointed justices might someday overturn the ruling. The day after the Michigan decision, Obama honored the passing of former Atlanta mayor Maynard Jackson Jr., eulogizing Jackson for creating model affirmative action and set-aside programs that spread across the nation.

In 2004, a U.S. District Court disallowed the ordinance under which Chicago required the use of at least 25 percent minority business enterprises and 5 percent women's business enterprises on city-funded projects. In the immediate aftermath of the ruling, Obama and Jesse Jackson were among the prominent voices calling for a black leadership summit to plot strategy for a restoration of Chicago's construction quotas. Obama and his allies succeeded in bringing back race-based contracting.

Prominent among those allies were two of Obama's earliest and strongest political supporters, Hyde Park aldermen Toni Preckwinkle and Leslie Hairston. These two are known as fierce advocates of set-asides and key orchestrators of demonstrations and public-relations campaigns against businesses that question race-based contracting. When, in 2001, construction work was planned for South Lake Shore Drive, a major artery that connects Hyde Park to the rest of Chicago, Preckwinkle and Hairston seized the occasion to call for an extraordinary 70 percent minority quota on contracts for the project. They even demanded that, for the sake of race-based hiring, normal contractor eligibility requirements be waived. Then when work on South Lake Shore Drive was not awarded to minority contractors, a group consisting of Preckwinkle, Hairston, two neighboring aldermen, and numerous activists staged a surprise raid on the construction site, shutting it down and forcing the contractor to hire more blacks. A raid on a second construction site collapsed when several blacks were found already at work on the project. (The aldermen said these African-American laborers had been hired at the last minute to stymie their protest.)

Obama seeks minority appointee for ICC

The Chicago Defender

Biographical treatments of Obama tend to stress the tenuous nature of his black identity—his upbringing by whites, his elite education, his home in Chicago's highly integrated Hyde Park, personal tensions with black legislators, and questions about whether Obama is "black enough" to represent African Americans. These concerns over Obama's racial identity are overblown. On race-related issues Obama has stood shoulder to shoulder with Chicago's African-American politicians for years.

Occasionally, Obama has even gotten out in front of them. In 1999, for example, he made news by calling on the governor to appoint a minority to the Illinois Commerce Commission (ICC), a body that had previously attracted little notice among Chicago's blacks. In 2000, the *Chicago Defender* named Obama one of a number of "Vanguards for Change," citing him for "focusing on legislation in areas previously unexplored by the African-American community including his call that a person of color be appointed to the ICC." Obama did bring a somewhat different background and set of interests to the table. Yet the upshot was to expand the frontiers of race-based politics.

And the story doesn't end with Obama's support for set-asides. A *Chicago Defender* story of 1999 features a front-page picture of Obama beside the headline, "Obama:

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Illinois Black Caucus is broken." In the accompanying article, although Obama denies demanding that black legislators march in perfect lockstep, he expresses anger that black state senators have failed to unite for the purpose of placing a newly approved riverboat casino in a minority neighborhood. The failed casino vote, Obama argues, means that the black caucus "is broken and needs to unite for the common good of the African-American community." Obama continues, "The problem right now is that we don't have a unified agenda that's enforced back in the community and is clearly articulated. Everybody tends to be lone agents in these situations."

Speaking in reply to Obama was Mary E. Flowers, an African-American state senator who apparently broke black caucus discipline and voted to approve the casino's location in a nonminority area. Said Flowers: "The Black Caucus is from different tribes, different walks of life. I don't expect all of the whites to vote alike. . . . Why is it that all of us should walk alike, talk alike and vote alike? . . . I was chosen by my constituents to represent them, and that is what I try to do." Given Obama's supposedly post-racial politics, it is notable that he should be the one demanding enforcement of a black political agenda against "lone agents," while another black legislator appeals to Obama to leave her free to represent her constituents, black or white, as she sees fit.

Obama's fight to unify the black caucus on the casino vote was undertaken in partnership with state senator Donne Trotter. Yet nearly every biographical account of Obama lavishes attention on Trotter's claim that Obama was just a "white man in black face." The significance of that bit of campaign hype, offered while Trotter was running against Obama for Congress, has been exaggerated, perhaps because Trotter's epithet helps to defuse the notion that Obama himself practices race-based politics. Yet Obama does exactly that. His public legislative cooperation with Trotter, and with other black Illinois politicians, yields more insight into Obama's political plans than any electoral rhetoric or private intra-black-caucus backbiting. To the extent that Obama can be accused of having shaky "black credentials," that very accusation pushes him to practice race-conscious politics all the more energetically.

When the 2000 census revealed dramatic growth in Chicago's Hispanic and Asian populations alongside a decline in the number of African Americans, the Illinois black caucus was alarmed at the prospect that the number of blacks in the Illinois General Assembly might decline. At that point, Obama stepped to the forefront of the effort to preserve as many black seats as possible. The *Defender* quotes Obama as saying that, "while everyone agrees that the Hispanic population has grown, they cannot expand by taking African-American seats." As in the casino dispute, Obama stressed black unity, pushing a plan that would modestly increase the white, Hispanic, and Asian population in what would continue to be the same number of safe black districts. As Obama put it: "An incumbent African-American legislator with a 90 percent district may feel good about his reelection chances, but we as a community would probably be better off if we had two African-American legislators with 60 percent each."

Obama's intensely race-conscious approach may surprise Americans who know him primarily through his keynote address at the Democratic National Convention of 2004. When Obama so famously said, "There is not a Black America and a White America and Latino America and Asian America—there's the United States of America," most Americans took him to be advocating a color-blind consciousness of the kind expressed in Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream that his children would one day be judged, not by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character. Anyone who understood Obama's words that way should know that this is not the whole story. In an essay published in 1988 entitled "Why Organize? Problems and Promise in the Inner City," Obama tried to make room for both "accommodation and militancy" in black political engagement. He wrote,

> The debate as to how black and other dispossessed people can forward their lot in America is not new. From W.E.B. DuBois to Booker T. Washington to Marcus Garvey to Malcolm X to Martin Luther King, this internal debate has raged between integration and nationalism, between accommodation and militancy, between sit-down strikes and board-room negotiations. The lines between these strategies have never been simply drawn, and the most successful black leadership has recognized the need to bridge these seemingly divergent approaches.

However his views may have evolved in the ensuing 20 years, Obama surely knew that the King-like rhetoric of his keynote address would be taken by most Americans as a repudiation of the kind of race-based politics he and his closest allies have consistently practiced throughout his electoral career. It's difficult to gauge the extent to which Obama may have consciously permitted this misunderstanding to take hold, or the extent to which he still believes that the opposition between "integration and nationalism, between accommodation and militancy" is a false one. Neither alternative is particularly encouraging.

Liberals and Radicals

Throughout the 2008 campaign, Obama has made a point of refusing the liberal label. While running for Congress against Bobby Rush in late 1999 and early 2000, however, Obama showed no such compunction. At a November 1999 candidate forum, the *Hyde Park*

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Herald reported that "there was little to distinguish" the candidates, who "struggled to differentiate themselves" ideologically. Acknowledged Obama, "[W]e're all on the liberal wing of the Democratic party." Indeed, the common political ideology of the candidates was a theme in *Herald* coverage throughout the race. Rush's background suggests what that ideology was: A Chicago icon and former Black Panther, Rush received a 90 percent rating in 2000, and a 100 percent rating in 1999, from the liberal Americans for Democratic Action. Both years the American Conservative Union rated him at zero percent.

So how exactly did these two liberal candidates "struggle to differentiate" themselves in debate? During a candidate forum, for example, when Rush bragged that since entering Congress, he hadn't voted to approve a single defense budget, Obama pounced, accusing Rush of having voted for the Star Wars missile defense system the previous year. Since that contest, Obama's liberalism hasn't exactly been a secret to the folks back home. In 2002, Obama himself could speak hopefully of plans "to move a progressive agenda" through the state legislature, and local observers commonly identified Obama as a "progressive." When it endorsed him for the U.S. Senate in 2004, the *Chicago Defender* proclaimed Obama "represents renewal of the liberal, humanitarian cause." The *Defender* went on to assure readers that Obama would support "progressive action" in Washington.

Democratic leader Emil Jones and State Senator Obama, 2004

ASSOCIATED PRESS

The most interesting characterization came from Obama himself, who laid out his U.S. Senate campaign strategy for the *Defender* in 2003: "[A]s you combine a strong African-American base with progressive white and Latino voters, I think it is a recipe for success in the primary and in the general election." Putting the point slightly differently, Obama added, "When you combine . . .an energized African-American voter base and effective coalition-building with other progressive sectors of the population, we think we have a recipe for victory." Obama consciously constructed his election strategy on a foundation of leftist ideology and racial bloc voting.

The overwhelming majority of Obama's "Springfield Report" columns in the *Hyde Park Herald* deal with state or local issues. It's interesting, therefore, that one of the tiny handful of Obama columns explicitly dealing with national politics is a 2000 column pleading with readers to support Al Gore rather than Ralph Nader for president. Obama opens his column noting that he's heard many people complain that Al Gore and George Bush are beholden to the same "big money interests." In pressing his case for Gore—which hinges on Republican/Democrat differences on issues like Supreme Court appointments, abortion, affirmative action, the environment, and school vouchers—Obama makes a point of agreeing with some of Nader's criticisms of the major parties. Obama raises no objections to Nader's agenda and implicitly presents himself as someone who might support Nader, were it not for the danger of a wasted vote aiding the Republicans. It's also striking that so many of the policy considerations Obama counts as decisive are classic sixties-derived issues—precisely the sort of polarizing culture-war conflicts Obama nowadays claims to have transcended. In the end, Obama needn't have worried. Hyde Park voted 91 percent for Gore, 6 percent for Bush, and 3 percent for Nader.

Obama's strong liberalism is nowhere more evident than on the subject of crime. Throughout his Illinois State Senate career, crime was a top Obama concern. Crime is also a key contact-point between Obama and his most celebrated radical associate, William Ayers. We've heard a good deal of late about Ayers's Weatherman terrorism back in the 1960s and his lack of repentance. Ayers refuses to answer questions about his relationship with Obama, while Obama has dismissed Ayers as just "a guy who lives in my neighborhood." Yet several Obama-Ayers connections are known: Obama's 1995 political debut at the home of Ayers and his wife (and fellow former terrorist) Bernardine Dohrn, Obama's joint service with Ayers on the board of the Woods Fund of Chicago, a couple of appearances with Ayers on academic panels, and what the *New York Times* called Obama's "rave review" (not actually a full review, but a warm endorsement) of Ayers's book on juvenile justice, which Obama dubbed "a searing and timely account" in the *Chicago Tribune*.

For all the attention, the actual content of Ayers's 1997 book, *A Kind and Just Parent*, as well as the political context

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of Obama's interest in it, have so far passed unremarked. Obama supporters paint Ayers as having mellowed since his radical days, pointing to his wonkish interests. Yet Ayers's radicalism pervades his book on Chicago's juvenile court system. Founded in 1899 (long before juvenile murder rates shot off the charts), Chicago's juvenile court was the first in the world, intended to serve as "a kind and just parent" to offenders. Ayers's title, he explained in the book, is meant to "bristle with irony" as a commentary on an American "society out of control." Ayers expressed the same sentiment more bluntly in an interview published in the *New York Times* shortly after 9/11, when he not only dismissed the notion of the United States as a "just and fair and decent place," but said the claim "makes me want to puke."

A Kind and Just Parent is a thoughtful, well-informed, and beautifully written book, which provides revealing and sometimes disturbing glimpses of life at a Chicago juvenile detention facility. The book also virtually defines the phrases "liberal guilt" and "soft on crime." Ayers agonizes over a high school field trip years ago, on which he and other white students toured a juvenile court system largely populated by black boys. When recounting horrific crimes—and even his own mugging—Ayers focuses on the terrified insecurity of the perpetrators, rather than the harm they inflict. Testifying at the trial of a young felon he'd been tutoring, Ayers calls him "nervous, a little shy . . . eager to please." The prosecutor responds: "Would you call shooting someone eight times at close range 'eager to please?'" Actually, Ayers effectively does do this, opening his book with the claim that a young murderer had "slavishly followed the orders" of his gang leader, rather than acting of his own free will.

Ayers opposes trying even the most vicious juvenile murderers as adults. Beyond that, he'd like to see the prison system itself essentially abolished. Unsatisfied with mere reform, Ayers wants to address the deeper "structural problems of the system." Drawing explicitly on Michel Foucault, a French philosopher beloved of radical academics, Ayers argues that prisons artificially impose obedience and conformity on society, thereby creating a questionable distinction between the "normal" and the "deviant." The unfortunate result, says Ayers, is to leave the bulk of us feeling smugly superior to society's prisoners. Home detention, Ayers believes, might someday be able to replace the prison. Ayers also makes a point of comparing America's prison system to the mass-detention of a generation of young blacks under South African Apartheid. Ayers's tone may be different, but the echoes of Jeremiah Wright's anti-prison rants are plain.

Given his decision to recommend Ayers's book in the *Tribune*, it's fair to say that Obama is at least broadly sympathetic to this perspective. When Obama offers examples of ill-conceived legislation, he often points to building prisons: Instead of building another prison, why not expand health care entitlements? Biographer David Mendell cites Obama's irritation with fellow legislators who "grandstand" by passing tough-on-crime legislation, while letting bills designed to bring "structural change" languish. Debating Bobby Rush in 2000, Obama bragged that he had "consistently fought against the industrial prison complex." Obama's *Hyde Park Herald* column echoes these points.

Chicago Defender

Juvenile Justice bill in jeopardy?

Obama says he's not sure votes are there

An issue on which Obama made common cause with Bernardine Dohrn

The most intriguing thread linking Obama, Ayers, and crime, however, runs through Ayers's wife, Bernardine Dohrn. Dohrn founded the Children and Family Justice Center at Northwestern University, and along with her associates there, she regularly and energetically opposes "get tough" crime laws. Ayers draws on his wife's wisdom in *A Kind and Just Parent*, and Dohrn, like her husband, publicly presents her work on juvenile justice not as a repudiation of her youthful radicalism, but as a continuation of it.

The Ayers-Dohrn-Obama nexus was jolted into action in late 1997 and early 1998, when a major juvenile justice reform bill was introduced in the Illinois General Assembly. Written by prosecutors and sponsored by a Republican ex-prosecutor, the bill was neither simplistic nor partisan. Well aware of evidence that sending juveniles to adult prisons can backfire and actually raise recidivism rates, sponsors met rehabilitation-minded critics halfway. The proposed bill was an early example of "blended sentencing," in which juveniles who have committed serious crimes are given both a juvenile sentence and a parallel adult sentence. So long as the offender keeps his nose clean, doesn't violate parole, and participates in community-based rehabilitation, he never has to serve his adult sentence. But

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if the offender violates the provisions of his juvenile sentence, the adult punishment kicks in. That gives young offenders a powerful incentive to do right, and puts toughness at the service of offering kids a second chance.

Blended sentencing is generally viewed as an innovative compromise. To those on the far left, however, blended sentencing is just another mean-spirited "get tough" crime measure in disguise. That's why, when the Illinois blended sentencing bill was introduced in 1997, both Obama and Bernardine Dohrn were cited by the *Chicago Sun-Times* as key local critics of the bill. Steven A. Drizin, an associate of Dohrn's center (who is thanked in Ayers's book) was a member of the study commission that helped produce the bill, yet remained an energetic critic, not only of blended sentencing, but of nearly every other prosecutor-favored provision in the bill.

Meanwhile, Obama worked closely with the Illinois Black Legislative Caucus to slow the bill's progress, expressing skepticism about the blended sentencing provisions. While one report speaks of Obama negotiating with Cook County state's attorney Richard Devine for a compromise, there is good reason to believe that Obama's actual aim was to scuttle the entire bill. We have this on the authority of someone who may very well be Michelle Obama herself. Michelle Obama organized a University of Chicago panel about Bill Ayers's crime book in November 1997, just as the battle over the juvenile justice bill was heating up. That panel featured appearances by some of the key figures discussed in Ayers's book, along with Obama himself, who was identified in the press release as "working to block proposed legislation that would throw more juvenile offenders into the adult system." In effect, then, this public event was a joint Obama-Ayers effort to sink the juvenile justice bill—Obama's decision to plug Ayers's book in the *Chicago Tribune* the following month was part of the same political effort.

In January 1998, a front-page headline in the *Defender* touted Obama's claim that the juvenile justice bill might be on the verge of failure. Obama hoped that black caucus opposition to the sentencing provisions might be matched by concerns among some Republicans that the bill could force expensive jail construction (based on the prospect that the deterrent effect of blended sentencing might fail, thereby forcing more juveniles into adult prisons). Obama's hopes were wildly off-base. In the end, the juvenile justice bill passed overwhelmingly. Given his ambitions for higher office, Obama was no doubt reluctant to vote against the final bill. A last-minute, minor and uncontroversial adjustment to the blended-sentencing provisions by the governor appears to have provided enough political cover for the bill's sharpest critics including Obama to come around and support it.

Also in 1998, according to the *Hill*, a Washington newspaper, Obama was one of only three Illinois state senators to vote against a proposal making it a criminal offense for convicts on probation or on bail to have contact with a street gang. A year later, on a vote mandating adult prosecution for aggravated discharge of a firearm in or near a school, Obama voted "present," and reiterated his opposition to adult trials for even serious juvenile offenders. In short, when it comes to the issue of crime, Obama is on the far left of the political spectrum and very much in synch with his active political allies Ayers and Dohrn.

Obama's signature crime legislation was his effort to combat alleged racial discrimination by the Illinois police. In 2003, the *Defender* said Obama had "made a career" out of his annual battle for a bill against racial profiling. For years, profiling legislation was bottled up by the Illinois senate's Republican leader. When senate control shifted to the Democrats in 2003, Obama's racial profiling bill finally passed—just in time to give his drive for the U.S. Senate nomination a major boost. At the time, Obama touted his profiling bill as "a model for the nation." It's also said that Obama showed a willingness to listen to police during the negotiations that led to the final bill. With the Democrats in control, however, the police had little choice but to work with Obama. As Obama himself made clear at the time, the police never abandoned their opposition to the bill.

Police doubts were entirely justified. Obama's bill is a deeply flawed example of precisely the sort of grievance-driven race-based politics that fuels legislation on affirmative action and minority set-asides. All of these "remedies" falsely leap from statistical evidence of racial disparities to claims of discrimination. In the case of racial profiling, disproportionate police stops of black or Hispanic motorists in no way prove discrimination.

In her path-breaking 2001 study, "The Myth of Racial Profiling," Heather Mac Donald assembled the evidence. It showed that racially disparate patterns of drug-interdiction stops in New Jersey, one of the first states supposedly proven to have practiced racial profiling, in fact reflected racial differences in the transport of drugs. Drug trafficking is not evenly spread across the population (as profiling activists improperly assume), and for the most part New Jersey police were simply going where the drugs were. Wrote Mac Donald, "When white club owners, along with Israelis and Russians, dominated the Ecstasy trade, that's whom the cops were arresting." When the big shipments shifted to minority neighborhoods, arrests followed. That's good crime intelligence, not racism. The reason virtually every major law-enforcement organization opposes racial-profiling legislation is that these bills invariably fail to pro-

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vide benchmarks based on actual group-based variations in crime rates. Without such benchmarks, there is no basis for leaping from statistical disparities in traffic-stops to accusations of police racism.

Obama's February 16, 2000, *Hyde Park Herald* column was a textbook example of the racial-profiling fallacies Mac Donald exposed. Arguing for legislation to require the collection of traffic-stop data by race, Obama made the bogus leap from disproportionate traffic-stops and searches to accusations of racism using the same, baseline-free ACLU-supplied statistics Mac Donald critiqued. Obama then made a still greater leap: "Racial profiling may explain why incarceration rates are so high among young African Americans—law enforcement officials may be targeting blacks and other minorities as potential criminals and are using the Vehicle Code as a tool to stop and search them." The notion that the high black incarceration rates are due to racist traffic stops is utterly fanciful. (Mac Donald lays out the evidence not only in her profiling piece, but also in a second important study, published this year, "Is the Criminal-Justice System Racist?") Obama's column takes a leaf right out of Jeremiah Wright's playbook, stoking the worst sort of race-based conspiracy theories.

Indeed, Obama's racial profiling crusade shows his political alliance with Wright, Pfleger, and Meeks in action. We know from Obama's 1988 "Why Organize?" essay that a long-term goal of his was to politically organize "liberationist" black churches:

> Nowhere is the promise of organizing more apparent than in the traditional black churches. Possessing tremendous financial resources, membership, and—most important—values and biblical traditions that call for empowerment and liberation, the black church is clearly a slumbering giant in the political and economic landscape of cities like Chicago.

We also know from a 1995 profile that Obama viewed his legislative role as an extension of his grass-roots organizing career. So it's unsurprising to see in the *Hyde Park Herald* of February 28, 2001, that Obama's "grass-roots lobbying effort" for racial profiling legislation is to feature not only the ACLU and the Mexican-American Legal Defense and Education Fund, but also appearances by Meeks and Pfleger. The *Chicago Defender* notes the additional presence of Reverend Michael Sykes, an associate pastor of Wright's Trinity United Church of Christ. So Obama's drive for racial profiling legislation brought to fruition his long-time goal of politically organizing Chicago's most liberationist black churches. Of course Wright, Meeks, and Pfleger are known for their demagogic accusations of white racism. Obama's racial profiling bill fit squarely in that tradition. As with Bill Ayers and Bernardine Dohrn, it's evident that the liberationist preachers were also his valued political allies.

Like other racial-profiling activists, Obama frequently cites New Jersey's experience as proof of his case. A little-noticed 2007 study by University of Chicago professor Paul Heaton sheds some fascinating light on the profiling crusade in that state. Heaton found that as a result of anti-profiling reforms, annual arrests of minorities for motor vehicle theft in New Jersey declined by 20-40 percent. Unfortunately, during the same period, motor vehicle theft increased in minority areas. Heaton concluded: "It appears that official and public scrutiny of profiling behavior by police can lead to substantial reductions in arrests of minorities, although this enforcement reduction may carry the unintended consequence of encouraging crime in minority areas." In other words, Heaton's work tends to corroborate Heather Mac Donald's analysis—not Barack Obama's. Disproportionate traffic stops are largely a response to disproportionate crime, while using simplistic statistics to falsely accuse police of racism yields more crime, not less.

A New War on Poverty

Important though it is to Obama, the crime issue runs a distant second to his deepest passion: social welfare legislation. "Big government liberal," "redistributionist"—call him what you like, Obama's fondest hope is to lead America into another war on poverty. Everything in his state-legislative career points in this direction, and Obama calls for a renewal of expensive national anti-poverty programs in his book *The Audacity of Hope*. True, Obama's promotion of government partnerships with private-sector housing contractors (like Antoin "Tony" Rezko) was supposed to open up novel, post-Great Society solutions to the problem of poverty. Yet, as a devastating *Boston Globe* report on Obama's Illinois housing policy recently showed, the results of Obama's new war on poverty are just as counterproductive as those of the old war on poverty. Neighborhoods supposedly renovated now lie deserted by the private developers who took Obama's government handouts and ran—quickly building or renovating housing units, but failing to maintain them.

Race and crime issues excepted, Obama's Illinois legislative career as covered in the newspapers essentially boils down to a list of spending measures. Many of Obama's proposed expenditures were tough to oppose. Because he was working under a Republican majority for the bulk of his time in the Illinois State Senate, Obama became a master of incrementalism. His pattern was to find the smallest, most appealing spending proposal possible, pass it, then build toward more spending on the same issue. An Obama bill exempting juvenile prisoners from paying for nonemergency medical or dental services isn't something you'd want to vote against. Obama's small, targeted spending measures

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Figure 1
Senator Obama's Sponsorship Activity—90th to 93rd Illinois Senate

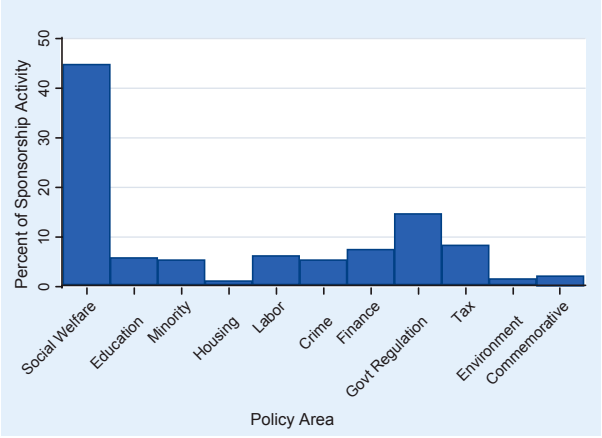
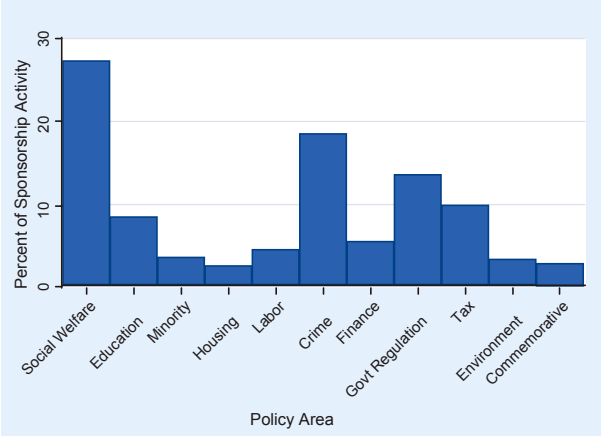


Figure 2
Senator Obama's Cosponsorship Activity—90th to 93rd Illinois Senate



Burnside and Whitehurst's graphs showing Obama's legislative priorities in the Illinois State Senate

tended to pass and to be followed by more: Obama called for a $30 million youth crime prevention package; Obama requested additional funds to expand the regulation of electrical utilities; Obama asked for $50 million over five years to overcome the "digital divide"; Obama proposed to fund anger management classes for children age 5-13; Obama ran for Congress promising to restore federal block grants to pre-Republican levels, and so on.

In a 2007 speech to Al Sharpton's National Action Network (NAN), Obama touted his Illinois legislative experience and challenged members of Sharpton's group to find a candidate with a better record of supporting the issues they cared about. (Incidentally, Sharpton named Jeremiah Wright's daughter Jeri Wright, publisher-editor of Wright's *Trumpet Newsmagazine*, to head NAN's new Chicago chapter in 2007. He named Wright's successor, Reverend Otis Moss III, its vice president.) Intrigued by Obama's challenge to Sharpton's group, Randolph Burnside, a professor of political science, and Kami Whitehurst, a doctoral candidate, both at the Southern Illinois University-Carbondale, decided to put Obama's Illinois record to the test. The two scholars made a study of bills sponsored and cosponsored by Obama during his Illinois State Senate career.

Published in the *Journal of Black Studies*, the results are striking. Burnside and Whitehurst produced two bar graphs, one representing bills of which Obama was the main sponsor, arranged by subject, and a second displaying bills Obama joined as a cosponsor. In the chart depicting bills of which Obama was the main sponsor, the bar for "social welfare" legislation towers over every other category. In the chart of Obama's cosponsored bills, social welfare legislation continues to far exceed all other categories, although now crime-related bills are visibly present in second place, with regulation and tax bills close behind. According to Burnside and Whitehurst, other than social welfare and a bit of government regulation, "Obama devoted very little time to most policy areas."

This brings us to what is perhaps the most striking result of our tour through Obama's Springfield days. Conventional wisdom has it that John McCain holds a political advantage over Obama on war and foreign policy issues, while Obama is favored to handle the economy. Yet Obama's economic experience is largely limited to social welfare spending. Indeed, precisely because of his penchant for spending, Obama's fingerprints are all over Illinois's burgeoning fiscal crisis.

The Illinois state budget has been in an ever-widening crisis since 2001. In an April 2007 report, a committee of top Chicago business leaders warned that the state was "headed toward fiscal implosion." Illinois's unfunded pension debt is the highest in the nation, while Illinois is sixth in the nation in per capita tax-supported debt. Yet the Illinois General Assembly—now controlled by Obama's Democratic allies—churns out at will exactly the sort of spending programs Obama pushed for, with only partial success, under the Republicans. The result is a fast-growing gap between revenues and expenditures (unimpeded by the statutory requirement of a balanced budget), rising fears of fiscal meltdown, finger-pointing, and political gridlock.

A watershed moment in Illinois's fiscal decline came in 2002, when crashing receipts and Democratic reluctance to enact spending cuts forced Republican governor

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George Ryan to call a special legislative session. While Ryan railed at legislators for refusing to rein in an out-of-control budget, the *Chicago Tribune* spoke ominously of an "all-consuming state budget crisis." Unwilling to cut back on social welfare spending, Obama's chief partner and political mentor, senate Democratic leader Emil Jones, came up with the idea of borrowing against the proceeds of a windfall tobacco lawsuit settlement due to the state.

This idea sent the editorial pages of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* and the *Chicago Tribune* into a tizzy. Editorialists hammered cut-averse legislators for "chickening out," for making use of "tricked-up numbers," for a "cowardly abdication of responsibility," and for sacrificing the state's bond rating to "short-term political gains." As critics repeatedly pointed out, borrowing against a onetime tobacco settlement—instead of balancing the budget with regular revenues—would be a recipe for long-term fiscal disaster.

What was Obama doing while all this was going on? He was promoting the tobacco securitization plan in his *Hyde Park Herald* column, railing against the governor in the *Defender* for balancing the budget "on the back of the poor," and voting to override cuts in treasured programs like bilingual education. Actually, far from "balancing the budget on the backs of the poor," the governor had trimmed evenly across all the state's most expensive programs. In the end, Ryan did force a number of cuts, yet the resistance of Obama and his allies took a toll. When, just a year later, Democrats added control of the governorship and state senate to their existing control of the house, they revealed that the state deficit had reached $5 billion—far larger than most had feared. Since then it's been a swift downhill tumble toward fiscal implosion for Illinois. Now ruling, the Democrats have continued their profligate ways, pushing the state's budget woes to new heights.

Illinois's fate may foreshadow the nation's. Obama's small and carefully targeted spending bills were expressly designed to win passage by a Republican-controlled state senate. But if Obama takes the presidency with a Democratic Congress at his back, we'll likely see a grand-scale version of the fiscal mayhem Obama and his colleagues brought to Illinois.

Obama's overarching political program can be described as "incremental radicalism." On health care, for example, his long-term strategy in Illinois was no secret. He repeatedly proposed a state constitutional amendment mandating universal health care. Prior to the 2002 budget crisis, Obama's plan was to use the windfall tobacco settlement to finance the transition to the new system. That would have effectively hidden the huge cost of universal care from the taxpayer until it was too late. Yet Obama touted his many tiny expansions of government-funded health care as baby steps along the path to his goal. The same strategy will likely be practiced—if more subtly—on other issues. Obama takes baby-steps when he has to, but in a favorable legislative environment, Obama's redistributionist impulses will have free rein, and a budget-busting war on poverty (not to mention entitlement spending) will surely rise again.

Obama's vaunted reputation for bipartisanship is less than meets the eye. The Illinois legislature has long been home to a number of moderate Republicans, less fiscally conservative than their colleagues, many from districts where the parties are closely balanced. It was easy enough to get a few of these Republicans to sign onto small, carefully tailored spending bills directed toward particularly sympathetic recipients. The trouble with Obama's bipartisanship is that it was largely a one-way street. Overcoming initial opposition from Catholic groups, for instance, Obama cosponsored an incremental bill on abortion, requiring hospitals to inform rape victims of morning-after pills. Yet rejecting compromise with the other side, Obama voted against bills that would have curbed partial-birth abortions. In other words, Obama is bipartisan so long as that means asking Republicans to take incremental steps toward his own broader goals. When it comes to compromising with the other side, however, Obama says "take a hike." Obama voted against a bill that would have allowed people in possession of a court order protecting them from some specific individual to carry a concealed weapon in self-defense. The bill failed on a 29-27 vote. Bipartisanship for thee, but not for me: That's how Obama ended up with the most liberal voting record in the U.S. Senate.

The real Obama? You see him in those charts. Fundamentally, he is a big-government redistributionist who wants above all to aid the poor, particularly the African-American poor. Obama is eager to do so both through race-specific programs and through broad-based social-welfare legislation. "Living wage" legislation may be economically counterproductive, and Obama-backed housing experiments may have ended disastrously, yet Obama is committed to large-scale government solutions to the problem of poverty. Obama's early campaigns are filled with declarations of his sense of mission—a mission rooted in his community organizing days and manifest in his early legislative battles. Recent political back flips notwithstanding, Barack Obama does have an ideological core, and it's no mystery at all to any faithful reader of the *Chicago Defender* or the *Hyde Park Herald*. ♦

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George Will

"The welfare state has always been judged by its good intentions, rather than its bad results."
Thomas Sowell

"Government doesn't work. You work, I work, Federal Express works, Microsoft works, the Salvation Army works, Alcoholics Anonymous works, but government doesn't."
Harry Browne

"Muticulturalism means your kid has to learn some tribal dirge for the school holiday concert instead of getting to sing 'Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer.'"
Mark Steyn

"We can have a free society or a welfare state. We cannot have both."
Robert Higgs

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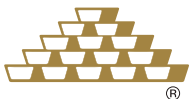

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The End of Nuclear Diplomacy

Iran to the West: Drop dead

By Reuel Marc Gerecht

On July 30, Ali Khamenei demolished what was left of George W. Bush's Iran policy. Iran's clerical overlord also put paid to Senator Barack Obama's dreams of tête-à-tête, stop-the-nukes diplomacy. Ten days earlier the Americans, British, French, Germans, Russians, and Chinese had gathered in Geneva hoping to convince Tehran to suspend uranium enrichment. True to form, Khamenei told them all to stick it. The Islamic Republic will not cease and desist: "Taking one step back against the arrogant powers [the West] will lead them to take one step forward," Khamenei replied. So much for the "significant" presence of William Burns, the undersecretary of state for political affairs, who went to Geneva to show Tehran and the Europeans the United States' willingness to have senior-level contacts with the clerical regime. (Note to the American left: If Ali Khamenei had even once sent a secret senior emissary to Washington expressing his *conditional* willingness to restore diplomatic relations, we would now have an embassy in Tehran. George W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and Bush Senior all would have—quite rightly—leapt at the opportunity.)

The mission by Burns, an accomplished "realist" diplomat, is exactly what Obama's campaign had in mind when they said that a President Obama would approve "preparatory" meetings with Iranian officials before he sought to have a face-to-face with a worthy counterpart, which given the Iranian political system means either Khamenei, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, or Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, the head of Iran's Expediency Council and the cleric who got Iran's clandestine nuclear-weapons program rolling. Since the Illinois senator first broached the idea of personal diplomacy during a Democratic primary debate, Khamenei has unleashed a barrage of speeches against "Satan Incarnate," "the Great Enemy," and "the Enemy of Islam and all Islamic peoples" (all shorthand for the United States). Ahmadinejad, a more spiritual man than Khamenei, suggested to NBC's Brian Williams in Tehran in late July that all the problems between the United States and Iran could be eliminated if Americans would just learn to live according to the dictates of the biblical and post-biblical prophets, who are all, according to Islamic theology, Muslim. Williams didn't appear to realize that Ahmadinejad was making a call for America's conversion. If he had realized it, he would probably have ignored it as perfunctory rhetoric of little real-world relevance.

But it is helpful to imagine the reverse: Suppose Barack Obama, George W. Bush, or John McCain were to call on Iranians to accept the teachings of Christ as practiced by America's Christians. Religiously, culturally, and politically the idea is unthinkable, of course. This ought to give us some idea of the chasm separating Americans and Europeans from the leadership of the Islamic Republic. This ought to tell Senator Obama and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice that face-to-face "preparatory" meetings with Iranians are irrelevant: American diplomats could talk for years to Saeed Jalili, the Iranian nuclear negotiator who is in the entourage of Ahmadinejad, and it would not disturb the universe in which Jalili lives and prays.

This gap isn't just with Ahmadinejad, who some on the American left like to depict as a man without real power in Tehran. It's with the entire oligarchy that runs the Islamic Republic. Look at the use of the word *dushman*, "enemy," in the speeches of Khamenei and Ahmadinejad. The usage is constant and nearly identical. The intensity of its use equals anything, I would argue, that ever came from Ruhollah Khomeini's anti-American pen (which was vastly more elegant). Ahmadinejad has done well in Iran's clerically dominated political system for a variety of reasons, but chief among them is the fact that he is Ali Khamenei's soulmate. Khamenei really hasn't had one since he became the *rahbar*, the guide for the Islamic Republic, on Khomeini's death in 1989. Rafsanjani and Khamenei, who are in many ways brothers-in-arms, who have depended upon each other since the early days of the

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revolution, do not appear to be spiritual kin in the way that Khamenei and Ahmadinejad are.

Iran's current president and the *rahbar* are very different men with dissimilar backgrounds (no layman can ever truly be one with an *alim*, a mullah), but they are very close in how they judge right and wrong (they hate, though tolerate, corruption among their allies), in the way their Islamic-Iranian identity wraps around them, in their perception of threats—particularly the cultural threat of the United States and the West. If anything, it is Khamenei who is the more hardcore, whose spiritualism is less colorful, less peasant-playful, and more (in a Western sense) overtly and crudely political. Ahmadinejad can happily imagine women playing and enjoying soccer; with Khamenei, the image is more of women in chadors with assault rifles on their shoulders shouting anti-American slogans. Ahmadinejad probably doesn't mind this image either, but he would allow the women time off to play soccer.

It's a good guess that both of these men *really* want to tell the West, in earthy language, that they are going to get a nuclear weapon and there is nothing the Americans, the Europeans, and the Israelis can do to stop them. When both men talk about justice, and they mention it constantly, they are thinking of the imbalance in the world between devout Muslims, who follow the true path of God, and infidels, with their damnable technical superiority. By acquiring nuclear weapons, these men intend to restore that balance, allowing real Muslims, especially the faithful Iranian vanguard, to recapture the high ground throughout the Islamic world. Ahmadinejad was glad to see Ambassador Burns at the Geneva meeting not because he wants to reach a compromise with the United States, and welcomes the new, post-axis-of-evil "flexibility" of the Bush administration, but because he sees the Geneva meeting as another step in the West's process of conceding a bomb to Iran. Ahmadinejad's triumphalism, which is the mirror-image of Khamenei's more tight-lipped glee, overwhelmed Brian Williams, who was reduced to asking the same questions repeatedly. When you think you've won, you don't need to pretend with an American news anchor that you might, just possibly, compromise and give the West hope that diplomacy can continue.

There is yet a slight chance the Europeans can revive the Bush-Obama diplomatic track. But the Europeans would have to do what they have so far refused to do and may no longer be able to do: Immediately impose economy-crushing sanctions on the Islamic Republic (Tehran has been rapidly moving its financial assets out of Europe). Russia, China, and India—the key states in developing a suffocating, worldwide sanctions regime—are unlikely to help since they all seem to have concluded that a clerical Iran brought to its knees by the West is worse than an oil-rich, nuclear-armed (and grateful) Islamic Republic. With their dogged efforts to increase centrifuge production (two years ago Iran had one cascade of 164 centrifuges; now it may have 6,000 spinning), Khamenei and Ahmadinejad act as if they will soon have a weapon. And once the Iranians get the bomb and put, or just imply that they are putting, nuclear-tipped warheads on their ballistic missiles, how much resolve will the Europeans have to confront Tehran? Given contemporary European sentiments and habits, isn't an effort to placate Tehran more likely?

Even under Angela Merkel, a relatively pro-American chancellor, the Germans are much more comfortable with a policy of *Ostpolitik* towards Tehran, which satisfies both Germany's enormous commercial appetites and its pacifist sensibilities. And the Spanish and the Italians, who have substantial commercial dealings with Tehran? They have military bases in Herat province in western Afghanistan, and we have already caught them quietly negotiating with the Taliban in an effort to avoid casualties. Imagine if Iran, which is just over the border, were to put military pressure on them? Would they be inclined to look at the big picture or the small one, which has more Spanish and Italian body bags being flown home? And if the Germans cave, the French, who have been the most farsighted in discerning the fearsome strategic ramifications of a nuclear clerical regime, will probably, eventually, go with them.

It is now entirely reasonable to conjecture that Tehran will have nuclear-armed missiles before the United States is able to install a missile defense system in Eastern Europe. A year ago, the Bush administration, despite its rhetoric on the issue, had a rather uncoordinated and lackadaisical approach to advancing European missile defense. (The State Department and the Pentagon seemed to be representing two different countries.) Public diplomacy on the issue in Poland and the Czech Republic has been abysmal. The placement of interceptors in Poland may not happen because of differences that have arisen between Washington and Warsaw; putting these interceptors in Lithuania, which apparently has signaled its willingness to take them, may prove more difficult than many in Washington imagine; and the required radar base in the Czech Republic may not happen either, as the parliamentary vote in November on the deal signed this July is in danger of not passing. The Czech government needs 101 votes for the radar base to open; it has exactly 101 votes. Senator Obama has certainly not helped the cause of the Atlanticists in Prague who have put their political necks out with this unpopular issue (the Czechs' neutralist bent rivals that of the Swiss) by his refusal to back the radar instal-

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lation. Support from Obama might prove crucial in maintaining left-wing Czech support for the radar sites. For a presidential candidate who spends so much time talking about the growing Iranian threat, his failure to back European missile defense—a position the Democratic party will eventually embrace since it will have nowhere else to go short of preemptive strikes against Iran's nuclear facilities—shows the strategically underdeveloped nature of the Obama political team. Trumping John McCain with a loud endorsement of missile defense is also not a bad domestic political maneuver.

Even with a functioning antiballistic missile system in place to stiffen European spines, the mullahs may well be able to split the alliance once they have nukes. The allure of Iranian oil and gas is just too great. With Tehran suggesting that the Europeans have nothing to fear so long as they distance themselves from the United States in the Middle East and in Afghanistan, an American containment strategy on Iran, which necessarily has to involve the Europeans if it's going to have any economic teeth, may well be stillborn.

Thoughtful Democrats have realized the havoc the Iranians could cause in the Middle East once they obtain nuclear weapons. But few Democrats—or Republicans, for that matter—have awakened to the potential for Iranian nuclear arms to destroy the very transatlantic ties that both Obama and McCain say need to be strengthened to confront the many problems before us. When he was president of Iran, Rafsanjani began a divide-and-conquer strategy toward the West, trying to bring in the Europeans for investment and trade, while confronting the United States and lethally attacking dissidents at home and abroad. This approach was especially important to the development of Iran's then entirely clandestine nuclear-weapons program, since Rafsanjani didn't want the West lining up against Iran at a time when the clerical regime needed to build up its program to a "break-out" potential. Khamenei and Ahmadinejad abandoned Rafsanjani's and his successor Mohammad Khatami's cautious and slow approach to developing nuclear weapons. For a time, this abrupt change caused concern in Tehran that the United States and Europe might actually deploy economy-crushing sanctions or, even worse, that the Bush administration might order a military strike on Iran's nuclear facilities before the enrichment process had sufficiently advanced.

But the fear of George W. Bush has vanished. And we will now see whether Khamenei and Ahmadinejad have a correct understanding of Europe—whether it really still matters. Ironically, Khamenei and Ahmadinejad's confrontational strategy could prove more effective at dividing the Europeans from the Americans than did the wry smile of Rafsanjani or even the warm, soft handshakes of Mohammad Khatami.

Yet, the Europeans might still surprise themselves and us. Concern about the Islamic Republic's nuclear quest is palpable in Paris, London, and Berlin. Senior French diplomats who have been party to the EU-3 talks like to relate how Iran's European embassies are paying their bills with big wads of cash these days since they can no longer transfer the required monies through embargoed banks. The Europeans might still be able to unleash a tsunami of sanctions, sanctions that even the Italians could be shamed into joining. And it is possible that George W. Bush might again follow his better instincts and ramp up the bellicose language, suggesting that he will indeed strike before leaving office. It is even possible that Barack Obama could come to appreciate that his Iran policy has utterly collapsed, too. With Khamenei, loudly advertised *machtpolitik* is an indispensable inducement to a peaceful suspension of uranium enrichment. Perhaps the contemplation of his administration having to figure out a containment strategy against a nuclear-armed Iranian theocracy might convince the senator of the need now for a bit of eloquent bellicosity.

And John McCain, who has been curbing his more aggressive instincts for fear of sounding too warlike for an electorate spooked by Iraq, might again powerfully suggest that diplomacy without the threat of force has no chance against mullahs who view the Lebanese Hezbollah as their beloved children. The Bush administration can have as many "one-time meetings" as Secretary of State Rice wants with Iranian officials—there is nothing wrong with these encounters, or the discussion of an American-manned interests section in Tehran, so long as no one believes that they reveal latent moderation among Tehran's ruling elite. In the containment of the Soviet Union, the United States often made the Cold War quite warm. Apply the same logic: Bring back the aircraft carriers to the Persian Gulf.

A betting man would, of course, go the other way. More likely, we will get to see whether an Obama or McCain administration has any idea of how to contain a nuclear-armed, oil-rich theocracy willing to deploy terrorism and guerrilla warfare to ensure that "justice" is brought to the Middle East and Afghanistan. This is assuming that the Israelis—increasingly desperate as they contemplate their future opposite nuclear-armed Muslim militants who see the Jewish state as an insult to God—don't strike first and change everyone's planning. Perhaps it is not too late to breathe new life and urgency into the critical need for a united Western front against Tehran. ♦

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Charles Lindbergh addresses the America First Committee, Fort Wayne, Indiana, 1941

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World War II Revised

Apparently, the Good War was a Bad Idea BY WINSTON GROOM

Here come two very odd bedfellows: the right-wing battle-axe Patrick Buchanan, and the left-wing novelist Nicholson Baker, each dredging up the mendacious argument that Britain and America had no business fighting World War II. Buchanan even throws in World War I for good measure. Both volumes are apparently intended to counter the upsurge in World War II literature such as Tom Brokaw's *The Greatest Generation*, James Bradley's *Flags of Our Fathers*, and other works that extol the virtues and sacrifices of the Allied victory over the Axis powers.

Debunking those themes has been a favorite subject of fringe historians since the 1950s and '60s, most notably by one of Buchanan's primary sources, the revisionist Englishman A.J.P. Taylor, among whose notions was that Great Britain should have aligned herself with Soviet Russia instead of the Allies during the Cold War. Buchanan's polemic offers little beyond a rehash of the revisionists, except that, as usual, his verbiage is always in your face like a hot breath, spewing out facts, figures, and conclusions so contradictory it's akin to coming upon a man on a park bench arguing with himself.

Churchill, Hitler, and the "Unnecessary War"
How Britain Lost Its Empire and the West Lost the World
by Patrick J. Buchanan
Crown, 544 pp., $29.95

Human Smoke
The Beginnings of World War II, the End of Civilization
by Nicholson Baker
Simon & Schuster, 576 pp., $30

Haranguing that it was Winston Churchill and the British, not Hitler, who started World War II, Buchanan reaches back to the beginning, which he rightly sees as the First World War. There is nothing wrong with this, for history shows that without World War I there would never have been a World War II. Where Buchanan strays from common sense, however, is in placing the blame for WWI on Britain, and in particular on Churchill, whom he despises. Thoughtfully, he even provides a possible motive—his own Irish upbringing: "I yet recall hearing, as a child in the 1940s," Buchanan writes, "how the *Lusitania* had been carrying contraband, how the tales of German atrocities in Belgium had been lies, how the British had sent 'Black and Tans' to shoot down Irish patriots," and so forth.

By the turn of the 20th century, Germany had turned itself into an economic power straining to get in on the scramble for Africa, though all that remained by then were scraps. That was where the trouble started. The young Kaiser Wilhelm II was something of a crank and military nut who had ditched his great diplomat Bismarck to embark on a gigantic naval program that would rival the British Fleet. The British were

Winston Groom is the author, most recently, of Patriotic Fire: Andrew Jackson and Jean Lafitte at the Battle of New Orleans.

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understandably alarmed; as Churchill wondered later, "What did Germany want this great navy for? Against whom, except us, could she measure it, match it, or use it?"

During the next decade, the kaiser proceeded to disturb the peace of Europe by provoking a series of "crises" in an effort to horn in on the French and British empires. In the meantime he trundled out the old complaint (first lodged by Fredrick the Great) of Germany being "encircled" by her enemies (meaning France and Russia) and used this as an excuse to raise a five-million-man army.

The powder keg exploded in June 1914, when a Serbian fanatic shot and killed the heir to the throne of Germany's ally, the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The Austrians presented Serbia with a furious ultimatum, and when the Serbians complied, the Austrians attacked them anyway, bombarding Belgrade. In response to this, Russia, which had strong ties to the Slavic people, ordered a partial mobilization of her army, which prompted the Germans to issue Russia an ultimatum to stop mobilizing, or else. When she did not, Germany declared war on Russia on August 1, 1914, and two days later on France as well.

The overarching tragedy lay in a war plan the Germans had relied on for years in case hostilities broke out, the Schlieffen Plan, which called for an immediate German attack through Belgium on France, never mind that Belgium had declared herself a neutral since 1839, or that Britain and France were pledged by treaty to honor Belgium's neutrality. On August 3, Britain finally delivered an ultimatum of her own, giving the Germans until midnight to quit invading Belgium. When the ultimatum was ignored, a state of war was declared, prompting the melancholy observation of the British foreign secretary, Sir Edward Grey: "The lamps are going out all over Europe. We shall not see them lit again in our lifetime."

In Patrick Buchanan's view, the British decision to enter the war over Belgium was slick hypocrisy; in fact, he claims that a secret cabal of British diplomats—including a young Churchill, at the time first lord of the Admiralty—had already committed Britain to fight Germany in the event of an attack on France, and that the reason for this was Britain's desire to rid herself of Germany as an economic rival, as well as for British security.

Buchanan apparently deduced this notion from the teachings of the revisionist Scottish historian Niall Ferguson, presently instructing at Harvard, who promulgated it in his book *The Pity of War.* A contrarian of the Taylor school, Ferguson specializes in what might be called what-if history, and likewise blames the British for starting the war; e.g., "The German invasion of Belgium enabled the British war party to put a high moral gloss on a war they had already decided to fight for reasons of realpolitik."

Buchanan's premise respecting World War I is this: "Britain turned the European war of August 1 into a world war. For, while the wave of public sentiment against the [German] invasion of 'brave little Belgium' swept Parliament over the brink and into war, [the secret cabal] had steered her toward the falls for other reasons." These he lists as the preservation of France, British honor, retention of power, Germanophobia, imperialism, and opportunism. "For Britain," he writes, "World War I was not a war of necessity, but a war of choice."

Okay, but how can he explain this: Nobody had attacked the Germans, but the Germans, in fact, attacked tiny Luxembourg first, then Belgium, and then France, while their idiot Austrian allies were attacking little Serbia. These nations hadn't declared war on Germany until Germany had declared war on them first. Buchanan gets it right when he says: "World War I was not a war of necessity, but a war of choice"—but the "choice" was Germany's to make. If she and Austria had stayed within their own borders and minded their business, there would have been no World War I and, thus, no World War II, either.

But Buchanan will not hear of it. As far as he is concerned, the British trumped the whole thing up out of greed, envy, hubris, fear, and "opportunism," a thesis he supports by gleaning from such writers as Francis Neilson, a quasi-socialist/pacifist who fled England for America during the First World War to evade the draft, only to luck into marriage with a daughter of the Swift meatpacking fortune.

With devastating confusion, Buchanan demonstrates how Britain and its (to him) stooge, France, conspired, lied, provoked, and muddled through the interwar years until they finally painted Adolf Hitler into such a corner that the Germans were again forced against their wishes to attack their neighbors. And as always, Winston Churchill is at the bottom of it: "In 1933, Churchill had in the House of Commons vigorously attacked Mussolini's proposal for a four-power pact, the one comprehensive plan set forth in Europe which might have revised postwar treaties in a peaceful manner and held Hitler in check."

Of course, this quotation describes nothing more than the craven attempt by Mussolini to grab more land for fascist Italy out of the Versailles treaty, and its source is the odious Welsh socialist Emrys Hughes, who was imprisoned in World War I for refusing induction into the British Army. Where does Buchanan *find* these people?

In Buchanan's opinion, the smart move for Britain and France would have been to take Hitler's outstretched hand and make an alliance encouraging him to attack Stalin's Soviet Union. No weight is given to the fact that the same outstretched hand would have simultaneously snatched two of the greatest democracies on earth down into the sewer where Hitler and his thugs and executioners dwelled. When Hitler grabbed Austria, and then the rest of Czechoslovakia, after the appeasement pact in Munich, most of Britain saw with unflinching clarity what the Germans were up to. But Buchanan's contention is that Hitler only wished to restore to the Reich former German enclaves that had been detached by the Versailles treaty, and entertained no further plans for conquest.

In truth, Germany's whole economy was directly tied to Hitler's huge military expansion program. In order for it to succeed the Nazis had no choice but

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to feed, shark-like, consuming new territories, looting and enslaving whatever they conquered. It's telling that Buchanan's bibliography does not include a reading of *Mein Kampf*.

By excoriating Britain and France for having drawn the line for Hitler at the Polish border, Buchanan contradicts his own premise. If these two Western democracies had simply done nothing, he argues, the Nazis would have quickly taken Poland (which he dismisses as insignificant) and then overrun Stalin's Russia, which he claims—with some justification—was a greater evil.

But Buchanan's explanation of what would have come next defies rational interpretation. Does he really believe Hitler would have left France, England, and the rest of Europe alone at his back? Especially when, with the wealth of Russia already in his grasp, all of Western Europe and its riches could have been subdued at his will? The truth lies in what the Germans actually did, which was to steal everything they could lay their hands on and deliver it to Germany.

If the Nazis had conquered the Soviet Union, this would have *de facto* guaranteed that the United States would never enter the war, because there would have been no war to enter. The Axis, without Soviet Russia to contend with, would have quickly gobbled up the rest of Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East—as, indeed, they attempted to do—and the war would have been over.

Fortunately, Winston Churchill saw it clearly. But according to Buchanan, the guilty man responsible for drawing the line at Poland and causing World War II was, in fact, Churchill, to whom (in my view) the world owes an eternal debt of gratitude. Because even after the Germans swept again through Belgium, and then Holland and the Low Countries, and overran France, Churchill held Great Britain steady in the road, and fought the Germans alone, until Hitler *did* attack the Soviets—and the United States finally sloughed off the America Firsters and got into the fight, bringing an end to the Nazi regime.

Another of this book's cockeyed themes is that, because of Britain's stupidity in entering the war, and the high price it cost her, the British Empire was doomed. But all overseas empires—British, French, Dutch, Belgian—were doomed: The winds of nationalism were sweeping the world, and maintaining colonies was ceasing to be profitable. Even before the war Britain had agreed to let India, her "crown jewel," go and remained there only until the war was over lest the Japanese move in. The war might have shortened the process, but the era of empire-building was over.

The most outrageous, if not despicable, Buchanan assertion is that if Britain, and later America, had not entered the war, most of the Jews of Europe would have been saved. His tortured reasoning is that Hitler used war with the Allies as a pretext to murder Jews wholesale, and suggests that if Hitler had only been let alone after conquering Poland and (presumably) the Soviet Union, the Jews would either have been accorded a place in German society, or exiled. Again, one wonders, has Buchanan read *Mein Kampf*? And as if this nonsense and hypocrisy isn't enough, he attempts to smear Churchill by painting him as a racist who wanted an England for whites only.

"Had Churchill endured in office," Buchanan writes, "London would look entirely different today." When, in 1955, Churchill retired as prime minister, he "was no longer able to lead a campaign to 'Keep England White'—an astonishing slogan in a day when Dr. Martin Luther King, a disciple of Gandhi whom Churchill detested, was starting out in Montgomery." Only after Churchill left office, Buchanan declares, was Britain "on its way to becoming the multiracial, multicultural nation of today."

What smarmy cheek from the man who has written *The Death of the West*, bemoaning the doom of Western Civilization because of the population explosion among so-called "dark peoples," and *State of Emergency: The Third World Invasion and Conquest of America*, in which he forecasts the end of life as we know it, owing to the flood of immigrants across the Mexican border and from Asia! Winston Churchill had many faults, all of them meticulously scrutinized by serious historians; but his reputation doesn't warrant being besmirched by a goat-roper like Patrick Buchanan.

Partners in crime, to Baker and Buchanan

KPA PHOTO ARCHIVE / NEWSCOM

But wait—there's more!

Nicholson Baker's last novel, *Checkpoint*, the plot of which revolves around whether it would be okay to assassinate George W. Bush, was described in a review by no less than the *New York Times Book Review* as "a scummy little book." Yet Baker remains a darling of the left, in part because, by all accounts, he is a nice, avuncular, balding guy with twinkling eyes and a beard, and a decidedly not-in-your-face demeanor—unlike Pat Buchanan. But he is also either unbelievably cunning or the ultimate naïf.

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Human Smoke, Baker's entry into the corpus of World War II literature, floats light as a feather compared with Buchanan's ham-fisted tirade; but it is just as malevolent, reckless, and inane. To prove that Britain and America were wrong in fighting the Nazis and Fascists, Baker juxtaposes anecdotes by and about pacifists and political players during the 20-year run-up to World War II, manipulating his quotations to show that the pacifists had it right all along.

He brings to mind George Orwell's observation that "Pacifism is fine, so long as you're willing to stand the consequences." Some of those consequences are illuminated in *Human Smoke* when Gandhi provides this stupefying advice in an *Open Letter to the People of England*:

> If these gentlemen [Hitler and Mussolini] choose to occupy your homes, you will vacate them. If they do not give you free passage out, you will allow yourself, man, woman, and child, to be slaughtered, but you will refuse to owe allegiance to them.

Even Patrick Buchanan probably wouldn't have signed on for that. But unlike Buchanan—who, at least, argues his case—Baker, by arranging his "snapshots" with no context whatever, simply propagandizes the reader in a fashion that is at once dishonest and treacherous to any acceptable standard of historical inquiry.

There would be no problem with either one of these books if they didn't get so much attention, but they do: Buchanan's because he's . . . well, Pat Buchanan; and Baker's because the media generally regard him as "one of us." Get a load of one gullible critic in the *Los Angeles Times* gushing that *Human Smoke* proves that "World War II was one of the biggest, most carefully plotted lies in modern history." Both books plunge the reader into a disagreeable limbo of *déjà vu* / *Prèsque vu*. The devices may be different, but the message is the same: Churchill was a bloodthirsty warmonger; the Nazis, Fascists, and the Japanese were misunderstood; Britain and America were greedy, racist, stupid, wicked, conniving—well, you get the picture.

Save your money; read the funny papers. ♦

Joseph Alsop, Stewart Alsop, 1955

BETTMANN / CORBIS

Their Town

The lost Washington of 1968. BY EDWIN M. YODER JR.

Even the best political books are in their nature ephemeral, but there are exceptions. One is Theodore H. White's making-of-the-president series, especially the first, on the Kennedy-Nixon contest. Stewart Alsop's *The Center*, published 40 years ago this spring, and the subject of this reprise, is another. And it is instructive to ask why certain journalistic essays earn and enjoy a sort of immortality.

It assuredly isn't because the Washington scene is static. The capital whose exercise of power Alsop evokes so vividly, roughly modeling his book on John Gunther's once widely read *Inside* reports, was dominated by the troubled figure of Lyndon Baines Johnson and its consuming preoccupation, the Vietnam war. Robert McNamara and his whiz kids, cocksure architects of the war, had exited from the Pentagon, to be succeeded by the canny Clark Clifford. And oddly, there was a lurking fear of "race war," whose foreshadowing was thought to be the Watts riots of a few years earlier.

Other features of the capital of 1968, however, retain a lingering resonance. The efficacy of U.S. intelligence was sharply questioned, then as now. State and Defense were at daggers drawn, as usual. Congress, though it featured such eminent names as Fulbright, Stennis, and Mansfield, was deemed dysfunctional—"catatonic" is Alsop's term—because it lacked initiative and exercised only limited veto powers. "A bore," the author concludes. The Supreme Court, which Alsop treats in a late chapter, was certainly no bore, though the controversies current in the late 1960s are all but forgotten; but it was his blind spot. "Until rather recently" he had never set foot in its "pompous marble mausoleum," and it shows in a number of petty errors and misconceptions.

But if the question is why *The Center* remains an engaging read, it isn't so much the subject as the manner—the author's vivid way of bringing public

Edwin M. Yoder Jr., author of Joe Alsop's Cold War *(1995), is a former editor and columnist in Washington.*

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personalities and issues to life. It seems to have come naturally. Stewart Alsop had been briefly in New York book publishing before World War II. But the family name had been prominent in Washington journalism even in the prewar years—his older brother Joseph had written a Washington column with Robert Kintner in the mid-thirties—and the Alsop run continued until Joe ended his column in 1974, soon after Stewart's untimely death from cancer.

They had formed a partnership, writing their four-times-weekly "Matter of Fact" column for the *New York Herald Tribune* syndicate after 1946. Both had served with distinction in the recent war, Stewart as a British Army officer and then an American OSS operative, Joe as a brash Army captain in China, as publicist and backstairs lobbyist for Gen. Claire Chennault's Flying Tigers. The collaboration lasted for a dozen years. But in 1958 Stewart wearied of playing junior partner to his irascible and opinionated brother. Arguably the better journalistic stylist and reporter of the two, Stewart launched a glowing run as columnist for the *Saturday Evening Post* and *Newsweek*.

The Alsops, sprigs of a colonial Connecticut family with presidential connections (their grandmother was Theodore Roosevelt's sister and Eleanor Roosevelt was their first cousin), were adepts at shoe-leather reporting. No one, in fact, was more contemptuous of "thumb-sucking" commentary than Joe Alsop, although in his later years he wrote more than his share of it. At the top of their game, their prime rule was to present at least one previously unreported fact in each of their columns. They were on intimate personal terms with many movers and shakers in Washington society, politics, and journalism. But it was a misconception that they were content to gather crumbs of gossip at the fancy tables at which they supped.

Their basic tool was the interview, usually exclusive, in which Stewart listened more than he talked, while Joe often did the opposite. There were instances, amusingly recounted in *The Center*, when their scoops aroused the usual White House paranoia. When it was confirmed that the Soviet Union had unexpectedly tested an atomic weapon in 1949, a finding of which some were skeptical, they wondered, "How do we know?" Stewart Alsop phoned the chairman of the physics department at Georgetown and asked. That "source" knew. It happened that the same information had been relayed, in a nearly verbatim Top Secret report, to President Truman. The FBI was deployed to investigate the "leak," not for the only time.

The rich yield of some 15 years of reporting is evident in *The Center*, although the author admits that there was much about the hidden Washington of the regulatory agencies of which he knew nothing. Offsetting these deficits, Stewart Alsop enjoyed special entrée at the White House, then as now the true "center" of power, especially when his friends John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson were there. (They had limited regard for President Eisenhower and his millionaire appointees, whom they found dull and uninformed.)

Another favorite beat was the Foreign Service, which then boasted such names as Kennan and Bohlen. We read a good bit here of the frictions between the democratizers of the State Department and the diplomatic elites who were Alsop social friends. Stewart Alsop was also, for a time, an admirer of Robert McNamara in his Pentagon heyday, and of McNamara's attempt to bring rationality to procurement and, less successfully, to jungle warfare.

But this was, above all else, LBJ's Washington before the deluge. Such obvious later references as "Kissinger, Henry," "Watergate," and "King, Martin Luther Jr." are missing. Tragic twin assassinations overtook the book soon after its spring 1968 publication—of King in April, and Robert F. Kennedy in June; and the March Johnson abdication was unforeseen and indeed unforeseeable.

A rereader, searching this book after 40 years in the spirit of that "paleontological reporting" that was another Alsop specialty (that is, piecing together a story by inferences from "fossil" fragments) would note a few anomalies. One is an obvious comparative reticence and delicacy. Thus Walter Jenkins, a valuable White House aide, "had a nervous breakdown" and James Forrestal, first secretary of defense and an important Alsop source, "killed himself in despair" while trying to discipline Pentagon spending. In fact, as would surely be noised in oppressive detail today, Jenkins was arrested in a sordid sex incident in a YMCA men's room, while ex-Secretary Forrestal leapt to his death from an upper floor of the Bethesda Naval Hospital, where he was being treated for (then relatively unmentionable) clinical depression.

Another notable quirk is the profusion of colorful Alsopisms, such as "treacher" (traitor), a word that Stewart Alsop says he heard from a cab driver. But it was a known Alsopian favorite and his brother Joe was once heard to roar, in his cups, that someone at the same dinner table was a "treacher" to the country. Stewart Alsop likewise had an ear for playful metaphor and anecdote. Thus the illusion that the Pentagon could be "managed" might be pictured as a log with 30,000 ants tumbling down a rapids with each ant believing he was steering. And the mild Senate majority leader, Mike Mansfield, resembled "an amiable, exhausted monk."

Just over time's horizon when *The Center* appeared lay a challenge that would test Stewart Alsop's courage and reportorial brilliance to the limit: a 1971 diagnosis that he suffered from a mysterious form of leukemia. The medical anomalies of his illness eluded even the expert detection of physicians at the National Institutes of Health, and provided absorbing material for Alsop's *Newsweek* column and for a compelling memoir, *Stay of Execution*.

As he lay in his hospital bed one day, Alsop jotted in his notebook that being deathly ill was "a most interesting experience, though one wishes one were not so personally involved," a signature understatement. Although mortal illness is so often now a hidden, sterile, indeed technological subject, Stewart Alsop had the gallantry to defy terror and despair and write a small masterpiece of medical reportage, a readable pendant to *The Center* and a memorial to a supremely gifted journalist. Within two years, Stewart Alsop learned that

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his "stay of execution" was temporary; but the book reminds one of all that went dark when he died in 1974.

And to strike a personal note, both books remind us of a cultural strain of obvious importance to him. Stewart Alsop was gone when I came to Washington in 1975, but rereading these two books is, for me, a poignant reminder of something he and I (and millions of Americans of an earlier time) had in common, steeped as we were in an Anglo-American culture. It transcended regional differences—he was a New Englander, I a Carolinian—and was blended of song, story, poetry, hymn, and Scripture (above all those verbal masterpieces the King James Bible and the Book of Common Prayer).

Stewart Alsop's writing is plummy with these elements. One can't read many pages in either book without encountering a snatch of English poetry or a reference to Winston Churchill, the subject of sparkling anecdotes in both. Stewart Alsop suggests that what he and his brother Joe called "the Wasp Ascendancy" reached a symbolic terminus with the death of Dean Acheson in 1971; but its echoes linger still. Those of us who grew up in that world, even in different ages and places, were steeped in its song and poetry, as a brief memory may suggest.

Four years ago this writer and several friends were visiting in the Lake District. After a long hike through the fells (and substantial refreshment at a neighboring pub), we were sitting in the backyard of native friends, writers themselves. Loch Lomond was mentioned and I began to sing, "*By yon bonnie banks and by yon bonnie braes/ Where the sun shines bright on Loch Lomond . . .*"

Our astonished host asked, "Where on earth did you hear that?" I said that it went back into the unsearchable mists of a Carolina-Georgia childhood. It was, I suppose, a minor Alsopian moment, and explains why I feel a deep affinity with the shade of Stewart Alsop, fellow journalist, fellow Anglophile. The transatlantic culture that nurtured this old tie is fading now, with few to mourn its passing. But it will be missed. It already is. ♦

At War with Itself

Spain, the Spaniards, and their internecine history.

BY MARK FALCOFF

'The Third of May, 1808' (1814) by Francisco de Goya

THE GALLERY COLLECTION / CORBIS

Henry Kamen is the finest historian of Spain presently writing in any language.

Born (somewhat improbably) in Rangoon in 1936 and educated at Oxford, he arrived in Spain in the early 1960s, at the time completely ignorant of its language. Since then he has produced more than a dozen groundbreaking studies on various aspects of peninsular history, from Spain's expansion overseas to cultural and religious conflict in 17th-century Catalonia, as well as major biographies of Philip II and the Duke of Alba.

The Disinherited
Exile and the Making of Spanish Culture, 1492-1975
by Henry Kamen
HarperCollins, 528 pp., $34.95

Well do I remember, as a graduate student, the excitement of coming across his *Spanish Inquisition* (1965), in which he put forward the (to me) original argument that the persecution of crypto-Jews and *conversos* in the 16th century was inspired by the need of Spain's ruling elites to neutralize potential class antagonisms on the part of poor (usually "Old Christian") Spaniards by offering them abstract compensation in the form of racial superiority. As it happens, Kamen no longer believes in this interpretation, and in 1998 he produced a drastic revision, the main lines of which he restates in this volume.

Broadly speaking, *The Disinherited* is a history of Spanish culture, with the theme of exile forming a unifying thread that nonetheless disappears at times under the weight of the author's vast erudition. Unquestionably, Spain's political and social upheavals across the centuries caused exile to be central to the national experience. Kamen estimates that, between 1492 and 1975, perhaps as many as three million people left the

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country for political or religious reasons. This was true not merely for Jews and Muslims, officially expelled in 1492 and 1568 respectively, but also for the Jesuits, for members of the Hapsburg nobility who fled after the victory of the pro-Bourbon forces in the War of Succession (1700-1715), as well as collaborators with the regime installed under Napoleon's brother Joseph (1808-1812) and defeated partisans of the Carlist pretender in the 1830s and again in the 1870s.

One could also add the economic emigrés—some 3.5 million of them—who left for Cuba, Argentina, and Mexico between 1880 and 1936. The most significant outmigration in recent times took place during and immediately after the civil war (1936-39).

Kamen is dealing here not merely with the human consequences of regime change or political allegiances, but a Spanish version of what French historians like to call the *guerre franco-française*—a culture war over national identity.

As he puts it with a great economy of words, "Continuing expulsions . . . produced a constant turnover of native elites, making it impossible to establish continuity in the formation of an acceptable cultural tradition."

In point of fact, every ruler of Spain after Isabella the Catholic (1474-1504) was of foreign origin. The Hapsburgs were Austrians; both the Bourbons and the Bonapartes were French (in the latter case, technically Corsican); the present king's grandmother was English and German and his mother Bourbon-Two Sicilies (that is, both French and Italian). His consort, though formally Greek, is actually German and Danish. (They are said to converse with each other in English.) Who, Kamen properly asks, are more authentic Spaniards: "Those who leave or those who remain?" The answer, evidently, is neither or both.

The Disinherited is full of revisionist propositions, some of which will clearly startle even those who think they know something of Spanish history. To begin with, Kamen drastically revises downward the actual number of Jews expelled from Spain after 1492—not more than 50,000, which is barely a third or a quarter of previous estimates. He disputes the notion that the purpose of the Edict of Expulsion was promulgated to unify the country religiously. (How could it be, he asks, in the presence of a Muslim population five times as large?) Rather, it was to end public acceptance of the Jewish religion, which disappeared on Spanish soil for four centuries. Jews or, rather, people of recognizable Jewish descent forcibly or willingly converted to Catholicism ("New Christians" or *conversos*), continued to play an important role in Spanish life, some as distinguished members of the clergy, scholars, poets, and writers.

Moreover, he argues, *converso* attitudes and lifestyles remained a constant in Spanish life: in folklore, literature, music, even food. Although the Inquisition was originally established partly to root out Jews whose adoption of Christianity was alleged to be insincere, in fact its search for crypto-Jews ended in 1530, which is to say a mere generation after the formal expulsions. What remained was "a subtle and corrosive anti-Semitism that turned into one of the most typical components of Hispanic culture." Even today, Spain's anticlerical government of the left distinguishes itself as one of the Western countries most hostile to the existence of the state of Israel.

On the subject of the Inquisition, Kamen upends most of his previous views. The actual number of its victims was not large, he argues, particularly when contrasted with religious persecution in other European countries during the same period. The French under Henry II executed twice as many heretics; the English under Queen Mary three times as many; and the famously tolerant Netherlands actually did away with *ten times* the number of their Spanish contemporaries. The Inquisition as an institution was abolished in 1813, restored briefly the following year, abolished again in 1820, and restored once more before being eliminated once and for all in 1834.

In effect, Protestant historians have greatly exaggerated its reach and longevity. They seem not to have noticed, meanwhile, that during the early 19th century much of the emigration from Spain was made up not of anti-Catholic dissidents but priests, monks, and nuns fleeing from recurrent waves of violent anticlericalism.

> In certain parts of Spain the Church was effectively driven out and the practice of religion was suspended . . . [a] phenomenon . . . so astounding that it defied, and still defies all explanation.

During the mid-1830s a majority of monasteries were closed and upwards of 7,000 clergy were killed by mobs, a kind of dress rehearsal for the sanguinary events that took place in the summer of 1936.

If the clerical/anticlerical divide was a crucial variant of modern Spanish history, yet another cultural fault line was introduced by the French Revolution and, very particularly, by its brief Napoleonic expression in Spain. King José I (as he styled himself) was, indeed, imposed upon the Spanish throne, quite literally by French bayonets; but at the same time represented Enlightenment values and modern economic and social ideas that much of Spain's educated elite had long embraced.

Indeed, in some ways, he proposed to merely continue and expand the truncated reforms of his Bourbon predecessor, Carlos III (1759-1788). The war of independence (as it is officially known) was actually a civil war between the forces of tradition and modernity, with much of the population—stirred up by the clergy—confounding the latter with a hated foreign invader. When the Bonapartist regime was driven out, largely thanks to a British expedition under Lord Wellington, some 12,000 families fled in its van. The return of the Bourbons in the person of Fernando VII (misnamed "the desired one") did not represent, as partisans of the *ancien régime* had hoped, a restoration of the old order but, rather, a new chapter in the confrontation between an authoritarian monarchy and various forms of liberalism.

This unlovely quarrel continued well into the 20th century, climaxing in the civil war of the 1930s. Here Kamen draws upon the vast amount of revisionist literature that has been gradually accumulating since the establishment of

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democracy in Spain three decades ago.

Popular convention has it that General Franco's victory in 1939, and the subsequent establishment of a quasi-fascist state, produced a huge impoverishment of Spanish culture, driving the best of the country's thinkers, writers, and artists into exile. This is true, as far as it goes, but omits some crucial details that greatly modify the overall picture. On one hand, as Kamen explains,

> [M]ost prominent cultural figures went into exile not at the end of the war but at its beginning . . . they chose exile because they were disillusioned with the failure of the republic rather than because they opposed a hypothetical future Fascist tyranny.

On the other hand, the proximate cause of their hasty departure was a failure on the part of the revolutionary left to distinguish between bourgeois democrats and fascists. Astounding as it may seem, the anarchist hit list in June 1936 included such figures as cellist Pablo Casals and the diplomat-scholar Salvador de Madariaga, both of whom took flight before they could be "taken for a ride" (in the gruesome parlance of the day). They were promptly joined in exile by a virtual *Who's Who* of high culture: philosopher José Ortega y Gasset, critic Ramón Menéndez Pidal, poet Antonio Machado, physician-novelist Gregorio Marañón, man of letters Ramón Pérez de Ayala, poet Juan Ramón Jiménez, historian Américo Castro, novelist Ramón Gómez de la Serna, historian Rafael Altamira—the list seems endless.

Ironically, those who remained uncritical supporters of the new regime and left only in 1939—notably poet Rafael Alberti and filmmaker Luis Buñuel—were the ones who prospered most mightily in exile, beneficiaries of the sedulously cultivated myth of a martyred Spanish democracy.

Most of the prominent figures of Spanish culture that fled went first to France, eventually ending up in Mexico, Cuba, or Argentina, where they had plenty of time to reflect upon the fate of their country. There was even a republic-in-exile whose "president" sat in Paris and whose government was diplomatically recognized by Mexico, though by no one else. The question of what had gone wrong with the republic (and whose fault it was) continued to fill the pages of ephemeral publications and to agitate café tables, as well as the question of when it was politically correct (if ever) to return to Spain before the expected collapse or overthrow of the Franco regime.

By the 1960s the Caudillo, now presiding over a modest economic recovery, and granted new international respectability thanks to the vagaries of Cold War politics, felt confident enough to be reasonably forgiving of exiles with no previous Communist affiliations. Marañón defended his decision to return by saying, "I prefer the Inquisition to the Inquisition plus pedantry plus hypocrisy," e.g., the meaningless squabbles of exile factions.

The dictator no longer had any reason to fear intellectuals, since the rise of a consumer society was pushing them to the margins of public life anyway. Those who waited until after his death were in for a far bigger shock than those who had returned earlier. Max Aub, who came back from Mexico, complained that his country was no longer the site of struggle and heroics, but "a Spain of mediocrity, of the refrigerator and the washing machine." ♦

Please the Courts

Can judges and juries win the war on terror?

BY GREGORY S. MCNEAL

The United States has failed, as a legal and political culture, to address the threat of terrorism, a failure which has set the stage for judges to oversee wartime executive action. In *Law and the Long War*, Benjamin Wittes, formerly of the *Washington Post*, now at the Brookings Institution, anticipates the potential rise of unchecked judicial power. As conservatives brace for the consequences of the Supreme Court's *Boumediene* decision, they will find Wittes's critique of the Supreme Court to be particularly apt. But his criticism is not solely directed at the courts; instead, he offers a balanced critique of nearly all institutional players in the post-9/11 landscape.

Law and the Long War
The Future of Justice in the Age of Terror
by Benjamin Wittes
Penguin, 320 pp., $25.95

This balance will please and anger conservatives and liberals alike. Neither side, however, should ignore his insight and extensive research, which detail the need for comprehensive laws to govern the detention and trial of suspected terrorists, reform interrogation policy, and modernize surveillance laws.

Wittes notes how the Court used "the legal disputes over the war on terrorism to carve itself a seat at the table in foreign and military policy; matters over which it has, for good reasons, a historically limited role." But he also finds a great deal of fault with what he terms the Bush administration's fixation with executive authority and failure to solicit the backing of Congress. Those who ardently defend theories of inherent executive authority may bristle at his characterization of George W. Bush's conduct, but they must also recognize that President Bush's approach, which failed to engage Congress, necessarily created a dialogue solely between the executive and judicial branches, a dialogue in which the courts almost always have the last word.

In language which should frighten

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conservatives, Wittes details how the confrontation between the executive and judicial branches "set the table for a judicial posture in warfare far more aggressive than anything the court has actually done so far." Taken alone, however, any one of the Court's terrorism cases has "been far less consequential than many commentators imagine."

> The specter of a vastly different judicial posture . . . now haunts the executive branch—one in which the justices assert an inherent authority to review executive detention and interrogation practices, divine rights to apply . . . based on due process and vaguely worded international humanitarian law principles . . . and allow their own power to follow the military's anywhere in the world. Such a posture would constitute an earthquake in the relationships among all three branches of government, and the doctrinal seeds for it have all been planted.

If Wittes's observations are correct, conservatives should question whether fealty to theories of inherent executive power have sacrificed the broader war over judicial power for what can best be described as spotty victories in battles over terrorism policy. The reality for the next administration is that "neither unilateral rulemaking on the part of the President nor judicial review of whatever rules he makes up can mold a stable long-term architecture for a war that defies all of the usual norms of war." The only body capable of creating such a system is Congress, the branch least active and involved in the years since 9/11.

Wittes persuasively argues that "Congress has yet to put its mark on the law of terrorism and that the maturation of this essential body of law will founder badly until it does so." He also makes clear his case against a dominant role for the judiciary, insisting that

> Society asks a lot of a judge who has never been to Afghanistan and who has never served in the military, and who has no intimacy with the day-to-day conduct of its overseas anti-terrorism operations. . . .
>
> Judges, like the carpenter whose only tool is a hammer and for whom every problem therefore resembles a nail, will try to apply criminal justice evidentiary standards to combat operations.

Such language will convince many readers that the time for comprehensive legislation has arrived. Similarly, his descriptive analogies illustrate for the nonlawyer the necessity for a comprehensive legal structure. Writing about the consequences of congressional acquiescence, Wittes details how the possibility for a far more aggressive judicial posture sits like a "loaded and cocked" gun, with the Court having positioned "itself for a veritable sea change in the relationship between the federal branches in wartime. Yet it has skillfully done so without closing off any policy options for either the executive branch or the legislature in the short-term. It has not actually pulled the trigger."

While the first half of *Law and the Long War* recounts the failure of the political branches to construct a long-term legal architecture for the conflict with al Qaeda, and its attendant potential for judicial tyranny, the second half turns its attention to specific reforms. Wittes shows where human rights groups, administration officials, and other players have failed to seize moments of opportunity, where they overreached, and where they acted appropriately.

Analyzing detention authority and trials for suspected terrorists, Wittes admits that "detentions in the war on terrorism are something different from either war or criminal justice and they require legal arrangements that will hybridize the two." His solution is an administrative detention policy for overseas fighters and those who directly support them, built around a system using heightened civilian standards of detention and trials rooted in the law of war. Both would feature judicial review, but also legislatively proscribed review, which would protect against the threat of judicial overreaching.

Khalid Sheikh Mohammed (right) on trial, June 2008

JANET HAMLIN / CORBIS

The "frank truth" Wittes offers (and at which civil libertarians will bristle) is "that the American legal system tolerates indefinite detention in a number of settings less compelling than the disabling of overseas terrorists with no connection to the United States save the desire to kill its nationals." And in a few well-designed sentences he manages to deconstruct the "enemy combatant" theory upon which the Bush administration has premised its counterterrorism policy, while at the same time recognizing the underlying rationale: that detentions are "preventive incarcerations designed to keep

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extremely dangerous individuals from acting on their deeply-held murderous beliefs and instincts."

These are simple legal conclusions distilled from complex, entrenched legal policies, and Wittes disarms both sides in the debate over terrorism policy, compelling this reader to ask, "Why haven't we fixed this system?"

Wittes approaches the standards for detention in a pragmatic fashion, using civil confinement as his model, with accommodations made for intelligence information and limits on the duration of detention. Illustrating the common-sense nature of his approach, Wittes writes:

> Had Jose Padilla wished to blow up apartment buildings because of delusions associated with schizophrenia, American law would tolerate his commitment for as long as necessary to secure the public from him. Surely, the fact that he wished to blow up those buildings on assignment from Abu Zubaydah should not preclude a fixed . . . period of detention so federal authorities can protect the public, interrogate him, and try to build a criminal case against him.

While his standards require more proof than the current military detention process, Wittes convincingly argues that bolstering detention credibility will pave the way for trials which may lack all the procedural protections found in federal courts.

For those trials, Wittes remains pragmatic, arguing that federal courts are inadequate for trying terrorists. And to support his argument he cites multiple examples, ranging from the 1993 World Trade Center bombing trial to the José Padilla case, "successes" with serious underlying flaws. His reform goal is a "trial regime that gives detainees enough process to satisfy the commands of the Constitution and garner international tolerance, if not quite admiration, yet at the same time facilitates the maximum number of criminal trials." And to achieve that goal, Wittes needs a system of trials premised on the laws of war, with jurisdiction limited to violations of that body of law. Any other forum will necessarily trigger the full protections of federal courts.

Key to his approach is the necessary link between detention and trial, which augurs that a system with fewer protections than those found in federal court can only survive if preceded by increased standards for detention.

Wittes next turns his attention to interrogation policy, advocating aggressive tactics which "walk up to the line of legality in an effort to get information that will stop the next attack." Casting aside the well-worn ticking time bomb scenario, he focuses instead on a practical reality: the case of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, whose interrogators used waterboarding and other techniques which walked up to, and perhaps crossed, the line of legality.

Of course, debating the murky bounds of acceptable interrogation techniques necessarily leads to a discussion of torture and coercion. On this score Wittes offers consistently balanced research, citing examples from both sides of the debate to demonstrate the successes and failures of coercive interrogation. He ultimately concludes that "without a rigorous understanding of whether coercion works under any circumstances and, if so, what those circumstances look like, we have to accept at least the possibility that it *might* work."

The fact that it *might* work will lead security services to err on the side of preventing a catastrophe. Thus, Congress must grapple with whether interrogators should err "within the law or extra-legally, and if the latter, what the contours of that extra-legal action ought to look like."

Wittes's solution, consistent with his theme, is congressional action mandating humane treatment, but providing for flexibility in emergencies. He would require that "exceptions are just that—exceptions to the rules, not the cases that define them." He dismisses the proposal of congressional Democrats to obligate the CIA to follow the Army Field Manual, pragmatically recognizing that the CIA deals with different classes of detainees than the military, and requires different standards. To deal with exceptions, Wittes believes Congress should create statutory authority for the president to authorize emergency conduct, with appropriate notice to congressional intelligence committees. Doing so would clarify political accountability and keep the legislature informed.

This proposed reform, while practical and effective, faces two obstacles which Wittes leaves unaddressed: Convincing the president that subjecting himself to such congressional oversight doesn't encroach upon his powers as commander in chief; and given the covert nature of these interrogations, whether a president would comply with the reporting requirements.

Wittes also provides an edifying examination of surveillance policy, discussing the NSA surveillance controversy and reform of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA). His task was a daunting one, given the secret nature of the programs, but, as he points out: "At no time since FISA's passage has secrecy not encumbered public discussion of surveillance law. . . . Public debates over FISA have always rested on layers of inference built on top of a foundation of quicksand." For that reason this chapter is most useful for the way it frames the debate, rather than for any reforms it proposes. As Wittes admits, "The degree of secrecy simply precludes the sort of granular policy prescription we can attempt for, say, detention, trial, and interrogation."

He concludes by arguing that, *Boumediene* notwithstanding, America still has not defined its procedures for detention, interrogation, and surveillance. How to do so is "terrifingly, dangerously, paralyzingly nonobvious," but increasingly necessary. More terrifying, perhaps, are the unanswered questions: Will the next president engage Congress, and will Congress respond? Will the political branches accept Wittes's charge and design a system of laws for the long war, or will they continue to abdicate their responsibilities, paving the way for judicial supremacy? ♦

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It's a Jungle

Ben Stiller sends up Hollywood—and lives.

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

Tropic Thunder, the new comedy written and directed by and starring Ben Stiller, is so noisy, so busy, and so utterly filthy that it takes awhile for its satiric brilliance to assert itself. But assert itself it does; *Tropic Thunder* is the best send-up of the workings of show business since the original version of *The Producers*. In that great 1968 comedy, a crazed Zero Mostel decides to kill all the actors in the Broadway play he has produced.

Tropic Thunder
Directed by Ben Stiller

"You can't kill actors!" says a horrified Gene Wilder in response. "They're not animals, they're human beings!"

"Oh, really?" responds Mostel. "Have you ever eaten with one?"

In *Tropic Thunder*, actors are again at risk of getting killed, not by a crazed Nazi this time but, rather, by a Laotian drug gang. Four of them are making a war movie, and in an effort to make the film more authentic, their director has flown them to a remote location in the jungle, has told them he's filming them from hidden cameras, and then has set them loose. Only one of them has bothered to read the script, and so, when they find themselves in the drug gang's crosshairs, they don't know they're in danger; they think it's all part of the movie they're making.

This is a terrific premise, and Stiller (who cowrote the screenplay with Justin Theroux and Etan Cohen) makes the most of it. There has rarely been a sight in recent years as amusing as the baffled expression on a Laotian jungle assassin's face when Stiller comes tearing at him dressed like Rambo and firing a machine gun loaded with blanks. The movie benefits from the structure imposed on it by its plot, and gets better and richer as it goes along.

The farce is what makes *Tropic Thunder* a good movie. Its portrait of Hollywood—by far the most savage ever committed to film—is what makes *Tropic Thunder* so memorable. Most Hollywood satires have an odd politesse about them. They have good guys and bad guys, like all other Hollywood movies. They trash producers, but defend directors; attack directors, but spare writers; eviscerate agents, but make nice when it comes to the people who work behind the scenes. *Tropic Thunder* spares no one, and especially not actors. That is especially noteworthy, since it is his success as an actor that gave Stiller the power to make this movie.

Stiller is Tugg Speedman, once the cinema's reigning action star. When we encounter him, however, he has just come off two flops—the fifth sequel to his mammoth hit, *Scorcher*, and a disastrous effort to stretch himself by playing a mentally challenged adult in *Simple Jack*. His new Vietnam epic, called *Tropic Thunder*, is supposed to relaunch his career. But in the movie's first scene, he finds himself being out-acted by Kirk Lazarus, an insanely committed five-time Oscar winner who is an intentional amalgam of Russell Crowe and Daniel Day-Lewis.

Continuing with the comeback he began with his wonderful turn earlier this summer in *Iron Man*, Robert Downey Jr. gives a towering comic performance as Kirk, a 21st century Australian who has so submerged himself in his character that he has had his skin darkened chemically—and acts on and off screen as though he were a black man from Detroit *circa* 1965. Of course, what he actually knows about being a black man in Detroit in 1965 isn't all that much. He tries to claim racial solidarity with another costar, a disbelieving rapper named Alpa Chino (sound it out), by discussing the mutual scars they bear from 400 years of slavery and discrimination.

"Back off, Kangaroo Jack," Alpa replies. Kirk hugs Alpa and whispers the lyrics to the theme song from *The Jeffersons* in his ear.

Also along for the ride is Jeff Portnoy (Jack Black), a heroin-addled comedian who is an intentional amalgam of Eddie Murphy and . . . Robert Downey Jr. (who spent time in jail for repeated probation violations on drug charges).

Meanwhile, back in Hollywood, producer Les Grossman, perhaps the most foul-mouthed character in the history of motion pictures, begins to wonder whether he might actually profit from the deaths of his movie's stars. He is more grizzly bear than man, and when he finds himself on the phone with one of the Laotian drug cartel, there is no question which one of them is more savage.

None of Grossman's dialogue can be quoted, and viewers who cannot bear profanity should be warned that *Tropic Thunder* is not for them. But it is gaspingly funny, as is the identity of the real-life superstar who plays him—all but unrecognizably, since he is buried under amounts of latex that must have rivaled Downey's for time spent in the makeup chair.

The delicious inside joke here is that the actor in question needed this movie as badly as Tugg Speedman needs his Vietnam epic to reestablish himself as a dynamic screen presence. And so *Tropic Thunder* does, succeeding at this task as it succeeds in almost every other way. ♦

John Podhoretz, editorial director of Commentary, *is* The Weekly Standard*'s movie critic.*

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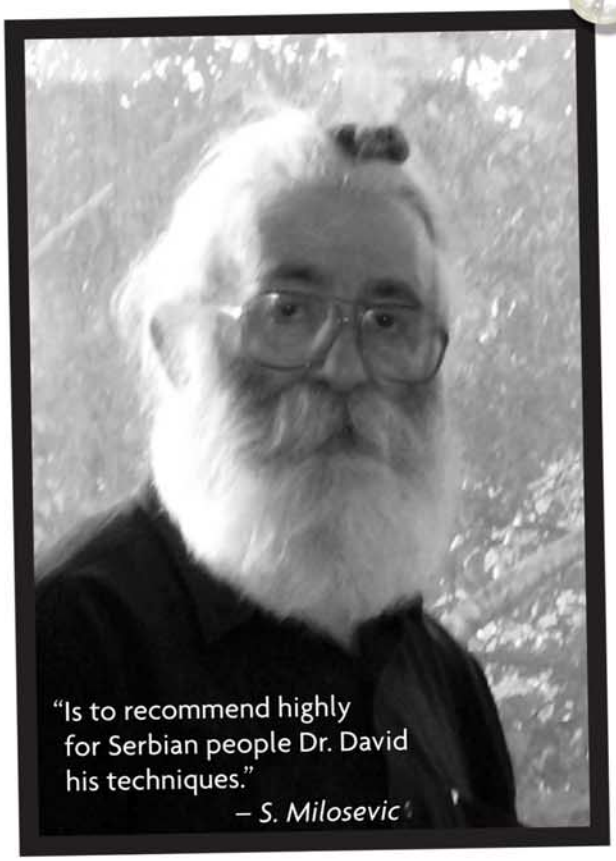
—Associated Press, *July 28, 2008*



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